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CHAMPS!

The Ducks bring home the Cup



Sporting News

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ALL-AMERICAN
FAN POLL**

Your take on
all the hot-button
issues

Vick ...

756 ...

Oden vs. Durant ...

and Olbermann, too



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Week of June 18, 2007





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Move over, mullet! You are no longer the undisputed king of stylish tail technology! Mullet, it's time to pass the torch to the all-new Fit Sport with sleek body design and aerodynamic rear roofline spoiler!

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THIS WEEK

> BASKETBALL

12 The future of hoops

Greg Oden and Kevin Durant are preparing for the NBA draft. O.J. Mayo and Eric Gordon are signed and heading to college. So now what? How about our Super 99—a list of the top recruits for 2008. By Mike DeCourcy

> NHL FINALS

16 A couple of throwbacks

Scott and Rob Niedermayer made the Stanley Cup finals a family affair, but Anaheim's win really was a testament to old-time hockey. By Kara Yorio

> NBA FINALS

20 A rock-solid dynasty

The secrets to the Spurs' success are so simple it's a wonder anyone tries to win this thing any other way. By Johnny Ludden

COVER STORY

> ALL-AMERICAN FAN POLL

22 Bring it on, baby!

It's you against us, the amateurs against the experts. The questions have been posed—and answered—and now we'll find out whether you're as sports-savvy as you think you are.



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

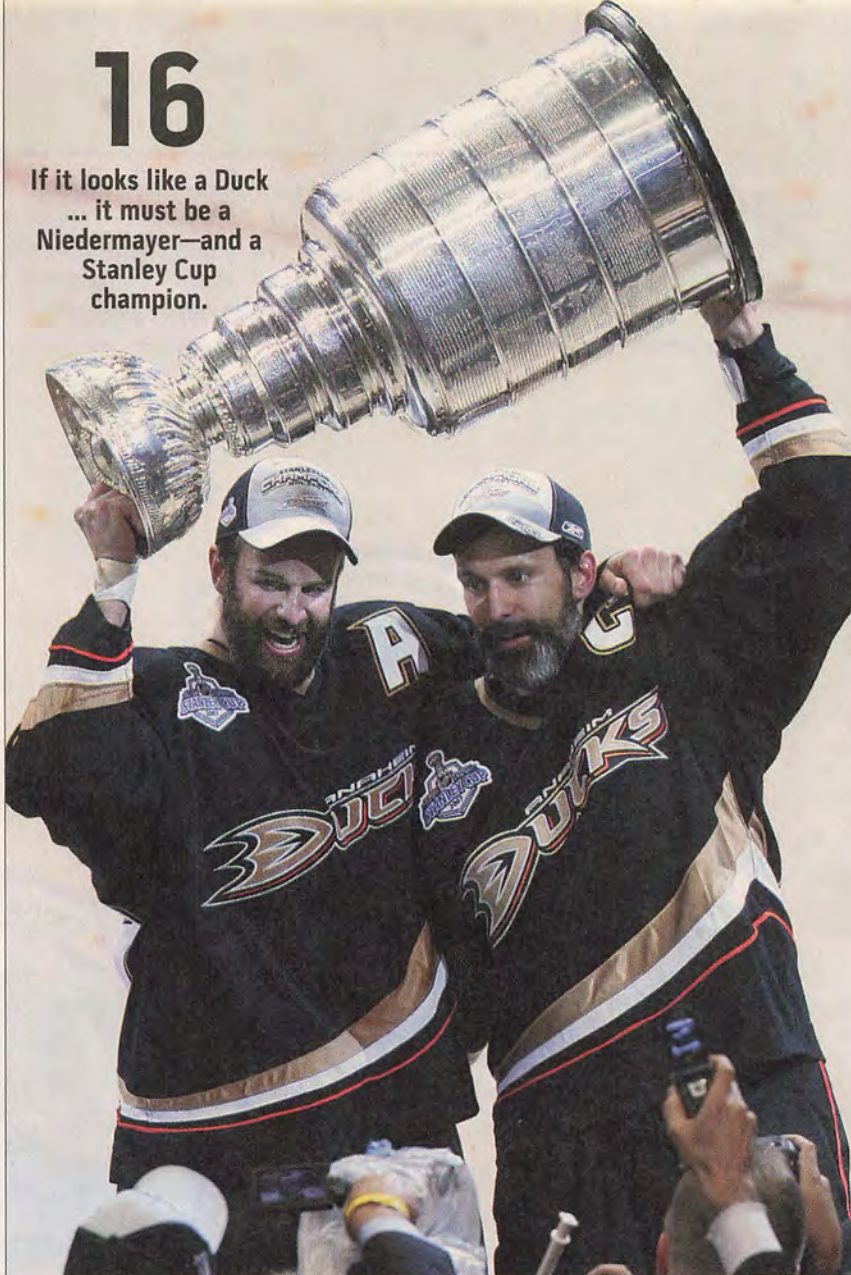
Will Roger Clemens throw like the Rocket of old or an old Rocket? We've got the answer.

COVER: JAY DROWNS / SN

Send your editorial comments to Senior VP/Editorial Director John Rawlings at jrawlings@sportingnews.com.

16

If it looks like a Duck ... it must be a Niedermayer—and a Stanley Cup champion.



KEVORK DJANSEZIAN / AP

KNOW IT ALL

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This week on SportingNews .COM



JAY DROWNS / SN

/NFL/ We're here to help

It's always tough for NFL fans to make it through those dog days of summer while anticipating the opening of training camp. So we're preparing you for the upcoming season with our NFL Support Group. We're previewing a team every weekday by asking (and answering) the burning questions each faces heading into the fall. On tap this week: Find out whether the Bears have what it takes to get back to the Super Bowl as we preview teams from the NFC North. Go to sportingnews.com/nfl.

'Only 6,321 crunches until Super Bowl 42, baby!' But will Brian Urlacher's Bears be in it?

/NFL DRAFT/ An early look at '08

This week, our War Room scouts begin dissecting prospects for the 2008 NFL draft, covering one position per week. Go to sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom.

/FANTASY BASEBALL/ Straight from the experts ...

Covering everything from the hot topics of the day (what's wrong with Carlos Zambrano?) to strategy advice (how to deal with deadbeat owners), our Fantasy Source experts are blogging every day at fantasygames.sportingnews.com/baseball.

... and the bench coaches

If you think our experts are burning up their keyboards, you should see what our members have to say. From a two-star guy like wildcatbill to a five-star guru like backell, you'll get the latest from our fantasy member bloggers. Go to sportingnews.com/tag/fantasybaseball.

/MEMBERS/ Five-star profile

★★★★★

Member name: B4192West
Member since: December 2005
Hometown: Franklin, Tenn.
Favorite teams: Astros, Falcons, Sonics, Blues, Midshipmen
Fantasy status: This member is not to be trifled with. He finished in the top 1 percent in college hoops once and in the top 5 percent two other times. He's also a skilled NBA, NHL and baseball fantasy player with a full trophy case.
On hockey: "I am a die-hard Blues fan who has regained a measure of hope thanks to John Davidson and Andy Murray."
On baseball: "I love the game, but I hate what it has become. Who is really worth \$252 million?"
On the NFL: "The one and only true football."
Burning question: "Whatever happened to Charlie Kerfeld?"

Think you could hold your own against our five-star members? Prove it. Join our free community and start your blog at members.sportingnews.com/member.

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TO KNOW LIST

7 things to make you an INSTANT EXPERT this week

1

THE MAIN EVENT

Sometimes, the numbers *do* lie

For some, the news that Texas' Kevin Durant ranked 78th out of 80 players in athletic testing at this year's NBA predraft camp in Orlando was a red flag that could damage Durant's status as the draft's No. 2 prospect. The guy could not bench-press 185 pounds. But it was no red

flag, according to league sources, for the folks who matter most: the Seattle SuperSonics, holders of the No. 2 pick. The team, apparently, is still enamored of Durant.

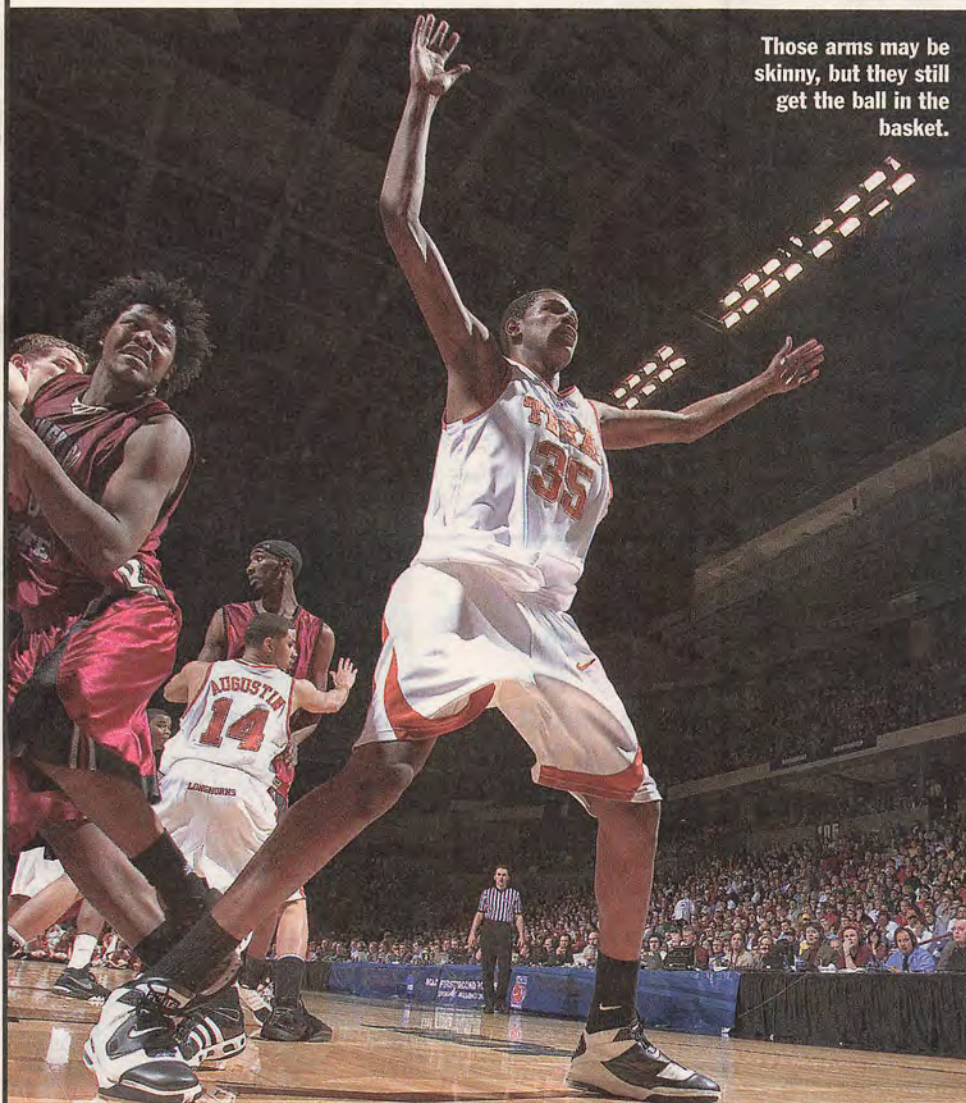
Instead, the Durant saga points to the relevance—or, perhaps, irrelevance—of the league's predraft testing, in which agility, speed, vertical leap and, yes, bench press are measured. It's an NFL-style mini-Combine designed to give teams established standards in each category rather than numbers culled on a workout-by-workout basis. But in the NBA, such numbers mean little. Last year, Brandon Roy ranked 30th in predraft testing. Dwayne Mitchell was No. 3. Roy went on to become the rookie of the year, and Mitchell did not play in the league. The previous year, Monta Ellis finished as the worst athlete in predraft measurements and dropped into the second round. But he averaged 16.5 points and 4.1 assists for the Warriors this season.

"We don't really factor it in at all," says one Eastern Conference executive. "Bench press has little to do with playing basketball. I'd look at it as a good thing. If Durant averaged 25 points at Texas without being able to bench 185, how much better will he be when he gets on an NBA strength program?"

Indeed, the only question that lingered about Durant's poor testing was why he showed up at all if he knew he would not be able to handle the bench press. "If I have a guy like that," says one agent, "I have him come up with an injury. There's no sense in putting him into a test he's going to fail. Look at the players who did not show up for testing because of injury. I'll bet most of them weren't really injured—they just couldn't bench 185."

—Sean Deveney

Those arms may be skinny, but they still get the ball in the basket.



JAY DROWNS / SN

NEWS YOU CAN'T USE

UT cheerleader beats Durant in arm-wrestling contest >> Daly just glad wife didn't stab him with stiletto heel >> Niedermayers spotted in tug of war

2 IT BEARS REPEATING

'At the end of the day, it was not fair to the Orlando Magic for me to go in there as the head coach knowing how I felt in my heart.'

—Florida coach Billy Donovan, on Sporting News Radio's Tim Brando Show. For college basketball Insider Mike DeCourcy's take on Donovan's change of heart, see page 55.

3 COMEBACKS

Risin' up to the challenge

When Quin Snyder took over for Norm Stewart at Missouri back in 1999, he was a 32-year-old whiz kid with a Duke pedigree and a movie-star persona. Most figured Mizzou was just a stopover to bigger and better things. Didn't quite work out that way—too many scandals, too much sloppy play and not nearly enough victories. Snyder resurfaced last week as coach of the Austin Toros of the NBA Developmental League, his first coaching job since he was pushed out at Mizzou 16 months ago. Snyder says he misses "the chance to compete." Here's betting he won't miss the NCAA and all its pesky rules and regulations. —Ryan Fagan



SCOTT ROVAK FOR SN

4 IN THE SPOTLIGHT: DIVERSITY IN MLB

It all comes down to cold, hard cash



Baseball sees Magglio and Sheff through the same green-colored glasses.

When Jason Giambi talked about that "stuff," the commissioner's office wasted little time reining him in. But when Gary Sheffield hollered racism, there barely was a peep from Bud Selig.

Why the difference? That's easy. Selig didn't admonish Sheffield because he knows Sheffield is absolutely right when he claims that baseball invests more in Latin countries than in U.S. inner cities. Sheffield even was half-right when

he claimed the reason is because Latin players are easier to control. Sheff just forgot a word: *financially*. Because Latin players are not eligible for the draft, they are easier to control financially. They can be signed for not much more than the price of a glove, placed in an academy and taught the game. If they show enough promise, they'll be paid. If they don't, at least they'll have gotten an opportunity.

Scouting, drafting, signing and then developing players is much more expensive than signing Latin players and would be even more costly if the draft went worldwide. But let's not overlook that draft-eligible players also benefit because the smaller the pool, the better their chances of being selected.

So don't expect change in the system anytime soon. Or, for that matter, Selig to call out Sheffield. —Stan McNeal



CAROLYN KASTER / AP

5 TELEVISION Super Big

Just think: One of these kids could be deflecting a pass in the Super Bowl someday.

On one side, 33 high school football all-stars from Pennsylvania. On the other side, 33 from ... well, the opposing state has changed throughout the past half-century. But for 14 years running, it has been Ohio. And for much longer than that, the Big 33 Football Classic (Saturday at 7 p.m. ET on NFL Network) has been one of the more remarkable—if underappreciated—events in sports.

Believe it or not, there hasn't been a single Super Bowl without a Big 33 alumnus: Guys like Marvin Harrison, Ben Roethlisberger, Ty Law and Orlando Pace in recent years—and legends like Jim Kelly, Dan Marino, Joe Montana, Tony Dorsett and Joe Namath going further back. Celebrate the past at big33.org, then imagine the future on Saturday night. —Steve Greenberg

6 Soaping up

The Brewers are surprise division leaders, and now a few of them are unlikely TV stars, too. JJ. Hardy, Bill Hall, Chris Capuano and Jeff Suppan guest-star on Wednesday's episode of *The Young and the Restless* (check local listings), which is set in Wisconsin. Sadly, the guys won't be pulling each other's hair or throwing red wine into each other's laps. Rather, they play themselves in a photo op with the show's fictional senatorial candidate. The scene ends with Hardy hitting on the candidate's ex-wife. It is a soap opera, after all. —Tricia Garner



MONTY BRINTON / CBS

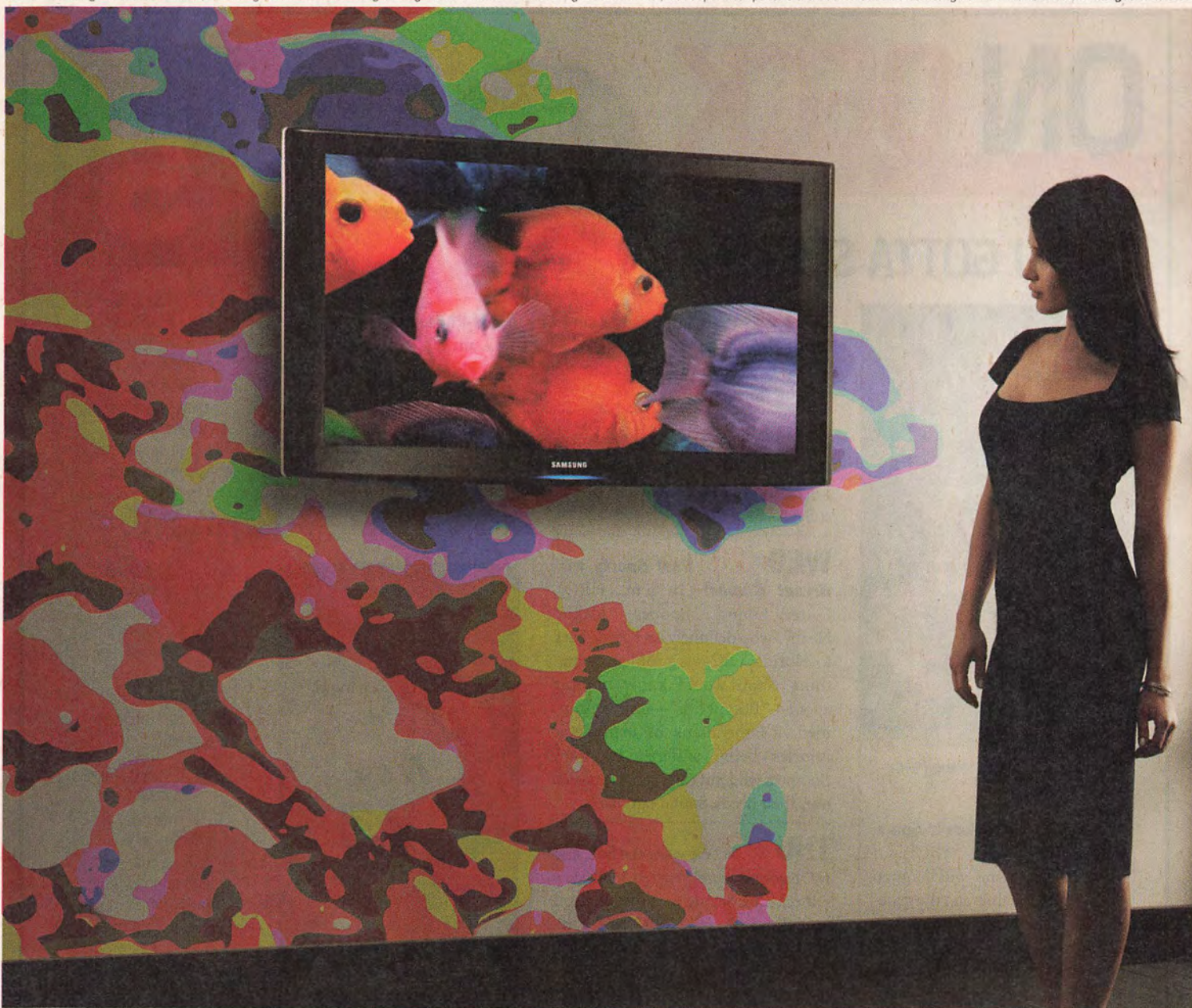
7 YOU HEARD IT HERE 'Any time you've got UCLA on your schedule, that's a guaranteed win.'

—Bengals quarterback and Southern California alum Carson Palmer (page 25), who perhaps had sirens ringing too loudly in his ears to notice a certain Bruins victory in Pasadena last season



AL BEHRMAN / AP

('It's mine!' says Rob) over Stanley Cup >> A tearful Zambrano laments: 'Can't we all just get along?' >> Clemens wins season debut, promptly asks for raise



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The week ahead in sports



Frustration, thy name is Phil Mickelson.

BOB HILLE'S STARTING

5

JAY LAPRETE / AP

THIS I GOTTA SEE All times Eastern

PICK of the WEEK



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Can the Spurs be stopped—or merely contained?

TUE 19 **Cavaliers at Spurs, Game 6** (9 p.m., ABC). Of course, this game will happen only if The Finals aren't the gruesome mismatch many are predicting. And if they are, perhaps you can spend your evening watching Carlos Zambrano beat the crap out of Michael Barrett.

SAT 16 It's hard to go wrong with **Tigers-Phils, Halos-Dodgers** or **Giants-BoSox** (3:30 p.m., FOX). Which reminds me of a joke about a surly, homer-crazed left fielder nicknamed the Greed Monster who had a run-in with the Green Monster ...

SUN 17 Will Tiger Woods go for the green from Oakmont's "Church Pew" bunkers in the **final round of the U.S. Open** (1 p.m., NBC)? Will Phil Mickelson still be in the pews praying to avoid another ugly-as-sin Open collapse?

WED 20 *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel* (10 p.m., HBO). Lottery-bound hooper Joakim Noah—who definitely isn't going back to Florida, OK?—is profiled. Something Noah would know nothing about—"Boomeritis"—also is examined. It's the litany of orthopedic injuries being suffered by Baby Boomers who just can't stop exercising over their heads. Sound familiar?

THU 21 "We want the ball, and we're gonna score!" roared Matt Hasselbeck after Seattle won the overtime coin flip during the **2003 NFC wild-card playoffs** (8 p.m., NFL Network) in Green Bay. And then the Seahawks didn't. And then Packers fans were so happy. No, really! —Steve Greenberg



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

That's the scream of victory, not of aching, aging limbs.

COMING AT YOU

In the June 25 issue

The price of glory. Hip replacements, knee replacements, gnarled hands. All have long been a part of life for retired NFL players. If the cost of a few years of glory were a lifetime of pain, most would do it again. But troubling findings have emerged concerning the scary long-term effects of concussions. Former players suffer from dementia, early-onset Alzheimer's and depression, conditions that are incurable. The price of glory is much higher and more profound than fans of the game ever realized—or the NFL is willing to admit.

- Under the radar and overperforming—the Angels' secret weapons.
- Did LeBron James steal the spotlight on the biggest stage of his young career?

Larry Morris was an NFL championship game MVP, and he's a grandfather of 12. But dementia has erased it all.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

4 **Trent Green.** He's finally a Dolphin, but, man, it took a long time. I've seen DeVilles on I-95 get to Miami quicker.

5 **The U.S. Open.** It's at Oakmont Country Club, which has the most talked-about 18 holes in and around the Greater Pittsburgh metro area. Not counting the Pirates' roster, of course.

YOUR TURN

You rant, we listen. Send e-mails to yourturn@sportingnews.com.

BLOG ON

From your blogs on sportingnews.com

4 The biggest compliment I can give **LeBron James** (SN, June 11) is that he has compelled me to watch this year's Finals after 11 years of boycotting the NBA.

—jaek via SportingNews.com

■ I wish the upcoming career milestones in baseball weren't being overshadowed by the home run chase because we are seeing a very classy, gritty group of players hit career marks. Tom Glavine (SN, June 4) approaches the game the way it's supposed to be approached: with respect and passion. —tsnmember_197440 via SportingNews.com

■ I am completely mystified as to why the Phillies' Cole Hamels was left off the list of good young pitchers. If he can stay healthy, he will win a lot of games for years to come. —Mark Bugbee, Red Lion, Pa.

■ When are you guys going to give Roy Oswalt some credit? You didn't even mention him as a possible 300-game winner. —Scott Hotard, New Iberia, La.

■ I have lost all respect for Billy Donovan. He offered the Magic a commitment. To go back on his word like that is very wrong. —Iceman_19911991 via SportingNews.com

■ Orlando should have put a Rick Pitino filter on Donovan's cell phone: "Shaquille O'Neal isn't walking through that door. Penny Hardaway isn't walking through that door..." —SpokaneOakfan via SportingNews.com

■ I'm struggling with wanting to root for Danny Almonte (SN, June 4) and not being able to. He may not have what it takes, anyway: A mid-80s fastball isn't going to get you anywhere unless you're Greg Maddux. And we all know there are incredibly few like Maddux. —angelsfan via SportingNews.com



JOHN KUNTZ / THE PLAIN DEALER / AP

RADIO★STAR

Real talk from a fan on Sporting News Radio

'This is now LeBron James' NBA. There's no more Kobe, there's no more Dwyane Wade. It's finally LeBron's turn to take the spotlight, and he won't be giving it up anytime soon.' —Dan in Akron on the Dave Smith Show

POLLING PLACE

How has NFL commissioner Roger Goodell's discipline approach been so far?

SPORTINGNEWS.COM MEMBERS

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15%	Too strict	14%
7%	Too lax	6%
78%	Just right	80%



MATT YORK / AP



JOHN RAOUX / AP

Donovan (right) said hello to the Magic one day, goodbye the next.

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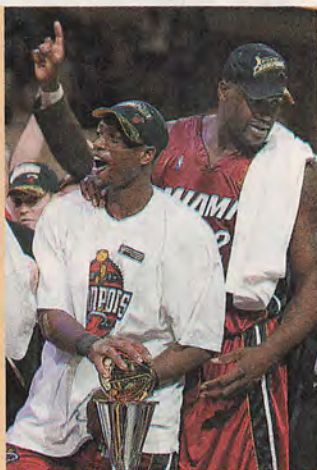
97—MLB-leading wins the Mets and Yankees had in 2006. Will there be a 100-game winner this year? Go to page 24 to find out.

When East meets West

.424 The regular-season winning percentage (1,497-2,037) for the NBA's Eastern Conference against the Western Conference since Michael Jordan's Bulls won their last championship in 1997-98.

.386 The Eastern Conference's winning percentage in Finals games (17-27 entering this year's Finals) since Jordan's last title. The East has won only two of the past eight championships.

Ah ... a rare moment of Eastern dominance.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Decisions, decisions

2M Estimated dollars a year Billy Donovan gave up when he bailed on the Magic job and returned to Florida.



.411 .391 .205

Winning percentages of Rick Pitino with the Celtics, John Calipari with the Nets and Tim Floyd with the Bulls. Perhaps Donovan just did his homework a little late.

There are other records to be broken, you know



61

The familiar number, in this case, indeed has to do with baseball—but Lord knows it has nothing to do with home runs. The White Sox—somehow—went 61 consecutive at-bats without a hit against opposing relief pitchers, a streak that ended last week. “That’s pretty embarrassing,” manager **Ozzie Guillen** says. Gee, you think?

JAY DROWNS / SN

Just when you thought the NFL had the market cornered on parity ...

56 Games the Athletics played without rising more than two games over .500 or falling more than two games under the break-even mark—a testament to both consistency and mediocrity. The A’s finally broke out of their rut last week with a 2-0 win over Boston that lifted their record to 30-27.

Their parents taught them to share

24 Years since a pair of brothers had won a Stanley Cup championship—until now. The Ducks’ Rob and Scott Niedermayer are the first siblings to capture a title together since Brent and Duane Sutter won with the Islanders in 1983.



No shooting the puck in the house, boys!

KEVORK DJANSEZIAN / AP

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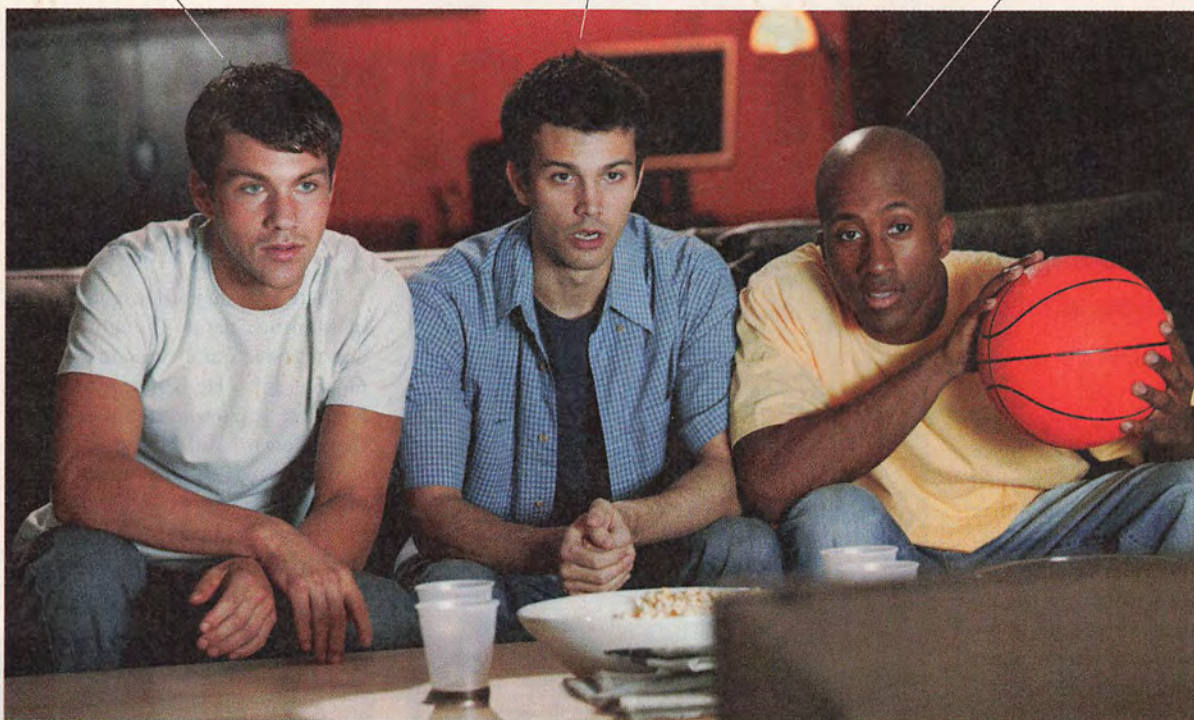
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"That girl in the 6th row,
8th seat over is really cute."

"In 3.4 seconds that chili is going to hit me,
but I have to see this shot."

"I only need to grow another
17 inches to play for those guys."



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The future of hoops

Greg Oden and Kevin Durant are preparing for the NBA draft. O.J. Mayo and Eric Gordon are signed and heading to college. So now what?

By Mike DeCourcy

Basketball prospects are growing up faster than ever. They make their first campus visits earlier, get their first scholarship offers earlier—and make public commitments sooner than ever before.

So if you see a name you like on our list of super 99 prospects for 2008—it's the work of veteran talent scout Van Coleman of Hoopmasters.com—you might find that player already is taken. There are 39 prospects gone, 60 available. No, wait. There are 38 commitments now. One player just put himself back on the market. It's like closing time at some hot L.A. nightclub.

The traditional summer recruiting period starts in a few short weeks. The 2008 class will not be among the greatest in recent college basketball history, but there are gems to be found. There always are.



No. 1 Greg Monroe

There are hints of Dwight Howard in Monroe's game, though Monroe doesn't have quite the same level of physical gifts. He is not as tall or as long, but he plays with greater energy than Howard did at the same age. Monroe needs to grow stronger and improve his ability to score inside. He'll never be a pure post scorer, but a jump hook would come in handy at his size.



No. 6 Delvon Roe

Although he's a huge get for Michigan State, Roe is probably not as promising a prospect as others rated as high. Roe has a power forward's game in a small forward's body—but what a game it is. He plays with Tyler Hansbrough-style intensity and can dominate a game along the baseline with his quickness and strength. He is great at driving from the corners and finishing inside. Roe is improving as a face-up shooter; he surprised scouts by making 3-pointers at the spring Houston Kingwood Classic.

No. 19 Tyler Zeller

The younger brother of Notre Dame forward (and former McDonald's All American) Luke Zeller, Tyler is a different sort of player than his brother. He has better quickness and is much more comfortable setting up in the post on offense, but he does not have his brother's knack for face-up shooting. Tyler will need to gain strength to become an effective low-block scorer in college, but he has played effectively against high-level competition.

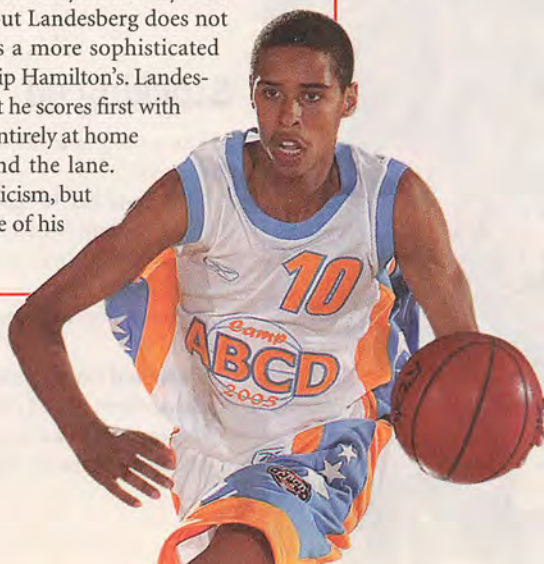
The Top 99 for 2008

Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht./Wt.	High school	College commitment
1.	Greg Monroe	C	6-10/225	Helen Cox (Harvey, La.)	Undecided
2.	Ed Davis	PF	6-9/210	Benedictine (Richmond, Va.)	Undecided
3.	Al-Farouq Aminu	SF	6-8/200	Norcross (Ga.)	Undecided
4.	Brandon Jennings	PG	6-2/170	Oak Hill Academy (Mouth of Wilson, Va.)	Arizona
5.	Samardo Samuels	PF	6-9/240	St. Benedict's Prep (Newark, N.J.)	Undecided
6.	Delvon Roe	PF	6-8/205	St. Edward (Lakewood, Ohio)	Michigan State
7.	Tyreke Evans	SG	6-5/195	American Christian (Aston, Pa.)	Undecided
8.	Jrue Holiday	SG	6-4/175	Campbell Hall (North Hollywood, Calif.)	Undecided
9.	Devin Ebanks	PF	6-8/190	St. Thomas More (Oakdale, Conn.)	Undecided
10.	B.J. Mullens	C	6-11/240	Canal Winchester (Ohio)	Ohio State
11.	Willie Warren	PG	6-3/185	North Crowley (Fort Worth, Texas)	Undecided
12.	Ty Walker	C	7-0/220	New Hanover (Wilmington, N.C.)	Wake Forest
13.	JaMychal Green	PF	6-8/225	St. Jude (Montgomery, Ala.)	Undecided
14.	Howard Thompkins	PF	6-9/225	Oak Hill Academy (Mouth of Wilson, Va.)	Georgia
15.	William Buford	SG	6-4/180	Libbey (Toledo, Ohio)	Ohio State
16.	Terrence Jennings	C	6-10/245	Mount Zion (Durham, N.C.)	Undecided
17.	Demar DeRozan	SF	6-5/195	Compton (Calif.)	Southern California
18.	Romero Osby	PF	6-7/215	N.E. Lauderdale (Meridian, Miss.)	Undecided
19.	Tyler Zeller	C	7-0/220	Washington (Ind.)	Undecided
20.	Drew Gordon	PF	6-10/210	Archbishop Mitty (San Jose, Calif.)	UCLA
21.	Sylvan Landesberg	SG	6-5/185	Holy Cross (Flushing, N.Y.)	Undecided
22.	Elliot Williams	SG	6-4/175	St. George's (Collierville, Tenn.)	Undecided
23.	Malcolm Lee	PG	6-2/180	J.W. North (Riverside, Calif.)	UCLA
24.	Nate Miles	SF	6-6/200	Cornerstone Christian (San Antonio)	Connecticut
25.	Luke Babbitt	SF	6-8/220	Galena (Reno, Nev.)	Ohio State
26.	Mike Dunigan	PF	6-9/225	Farragut (Chicago)	Undecided
27.	Emmanuel Ngedu	PF	6-7/225	Brewster Academy (Wolfeboro, N.H.)	Arizona
28.	Travis Releford	SG	6-3/180	Bishop Miege (Shawnee Mission, Kan.)	Undecided
29.	J'Covan Brown	PG	6-3/190	Memorial (Port Arthur, Texas)	Undecided
30.	Yancy Gates	C	6-9/235	Withrow (Cincinnati)	Cincinnati
31.	Terrelle Pryor	SF	6-6/210	Jeannette (Pa.)	Undecided
32.	Darius Miller	SF	6-6/190	Mason County (Maysville, Ky.)	Undecided
33.	Jerime Anderson	PG	6-2/170	Canyon (Anaheim)	UCLA
34.	Kenny Kadji	C	6-10/220	Pendleton School (Bradenton, Fla.)	Undecided
35.	Scotty Hopson	SF	6-6/195	University Heights Academy (Hopkinsville, Ky.)	Mississippi State
36.	Tony Woods	C	7-0/210	Rome (Ga.)	Undecided
37.	DeAndre Liggins	SG	6-6/190	George Washington (Chicago)	Undecided

No. 21 Sylvan Landesberg

He's the top player in New York and may be the city's best prospect since Sebastian Telfair, but Landesberg does not play with big-city flash. He plays a more sophisticated game that could be compared to Rip Hamilton's. Landesberg is a fine perimeter shooter, but he scores first with his creativity and intensity and is entirely at home inside the 3-point arc and around the lane. There are concerns about his athleticism, but Landesberg has advantages because of his height and length.

Van Coleman is a national recruiting analyst for CSTV and the publisher of Hoopmasters.com. Check his site this summer for player updates.



BOB LEVERONE / SN



AJ MAST FOR SN

Back on the market

These players committed once, then reopened their recruiting:

No. 4 Brandon Jennings, formerly Southern California. Now headed to Arizona. It looked as if Jennings would



BOB LEVERONE / SN

succeed O.J. Mayo with the Trojans, but now he'll join the long line of gifted Arizona point guards.

No. 31 Terrelle Pryor, formerly Pitt. Now considering football offers.

No. 53 Jeff Withey, formerly Louisville. Now considering many others.

No. 71 LaRon Dendy, formerly Clemson. Now considering several others.

No. 31 Terrelle Pryor

One college coach says if Pryor concentrated exclusively on basketball, he'd be the No. 1 prospect. Well, he's the No. 1 football prospect even though he's still playing hoops. Pryor might give up this game to concentrate on playing quarterback at the college level, but he is so physically gifted that he could contribute to a high-major basketball program simply by showing up in mid-January and playing to the start of spring practice. A lot of basketball coaches are rooting for their school's football counterparts to land him.

SUPER 99

THE BEST OF THE 2008
HIGH SCHOOL CLASS

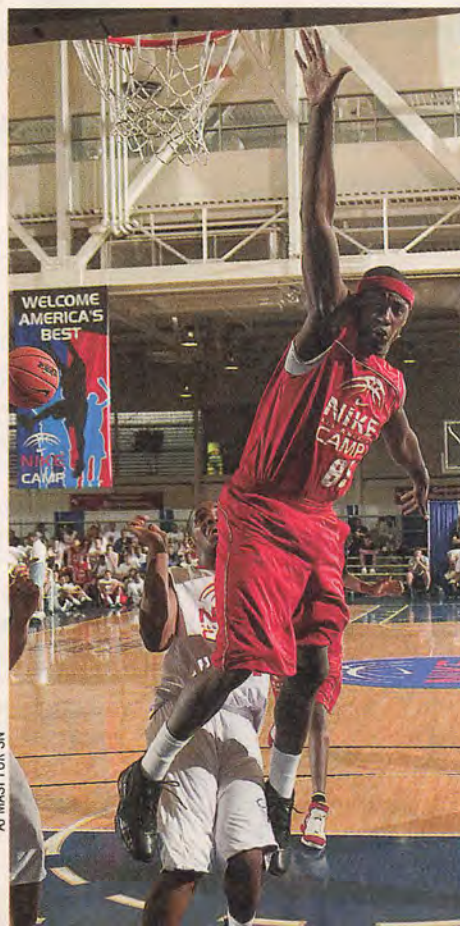
No. 38 Iman Shumpert

Perhaps the fastest-rising prospect, Shumpert has benefited from his strong play in high-profile spring tournaments. He has had to work on fixing his shooting technique, but improvement in that area has made him a more complete scorer. Unlike many prospects who don't like to admit weaknesses, Shumpert manages to address his deficiencies while remaining a confident player. He is not flashy but is efficient and intelligent on the court. Shumpert is righthanded, but he is able to make plays with his left hand and is an excellent defensive prospect.

No. 55 Anthony Crater

Some offcourt distractions affected Crater's spring play and knocked him way down the list. But he's still one of the most dynamic point guards. As one college coach says, "He didn't lose his vision." Crater is a mesmerizing passer who keeps teammates involved. One legitimate concern is a lack of strength. His frame does not suggest it will be easy for him to gain weight or maintain it when he arrives at Ohio State. He'll need to find a way to avoid being blown off the ball by stronger guards.

Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht./Wt.	High school	College commitment
38.	Iman Shumpert	SG	6-4/185	Oak Park and River Forest (Oak Park, Ill.)	Undecided
39.	Xavier Gibson	C	6-9/230	Northview (Dothan, Ala.)	Undecided
40.	Troy Gillenwater	PF	6-8/215	Stoneridge Prep (Simi Valley, Calif.)	Oklahoma State
41.	Larry Drew	PG	6-1/170	Taft (Woodland Hills, Calif.)	North Carolina
42.	Chris Singleton	PF	6-9/215	Cherokee (Canton, Ga.)	Undecided
43.	Anthony Jones	PF	6-10/195	Jack Yates (Houston)	Undecided
44.	Chris Braswell	PF	6-9/210	DeMatha (Hyattsville, Md.)	Georgetown
45.	Korie Lucious	PG	5-11/165	Pius XI (Milwaukee)	Michigan State
46.	J'Mison Morgan	C	6-11/230	South Oak Cliff (Dallas)	Undecided
47.	Catalin Baciuc	C	7-0/225	Veritas Christian Academy (Fletcher, N.C.)	Clemson
48.	Steve Tchiengang	PF	6-8/230	Cypress Community Christian (Houston)	Undecided
49.	Eshaunte Jones	SG	6-4/180	North Side (Fort Wayne, Ind.)	Indiana
50.	D.J. Seeley	SG	6-4/180	Modesto (Calif.) Christian	California
51.	Kris Joseph	SF	6-7/190	Archbishop Carroll (Washington, D.C.)	Syracuse
52.	Matt Gatens	SG	6-4/200	City High (Iowa City, Iowa)	Iowa
53.	Jeff Withey	C	7-0/230	Horizon (San Diego)	Undecided
54.	Bud Mackey	SG	6-3/175	Scott County (Georgetown, Ky.)	Indiana
55.	Anthony Crater	PG	6-2/165	Southwestern Academy (Flint, Mich.)	Ohio State
56.	Angel Garcia	C	6-10/225	East Chicago	Undecided
57.	Andrew Steele	PG	6-3/195	John Carroll (Birmingham, Ala.)	Undecided
58.	Sean Mosley	SF	6-6/205	St. Frances Academy (Baltimore)	Undecided
59.	Clarence Trent	SF	6-7/235	Gig Harbor (Wash.)	Undecided
60.	Matt Simpkins	PF	6-9/235	Capital Christian (Sacramento)	Undecided
61.	Kenny Frease	C	6-11/225	Perry (Massillon, Ohio)	Xavier
62.	Kemba Walker	PG	6-1/175	Rice (N.Y.)	Undecided
63.	Terrance Henry	PF	6-9/190	Carroll (Monroe, La.)	Undecided
64.	Courtney Fortson	PG	6-2/175	Jefferson Davis (Montgomery, Ala.)	Undecided
65.	Henry Sims	PF	6-8/200	Mount St. Joseph (Baltimore)	Georgetown
66.	Scott Suggs	SF	6-5/190	Washington (Mo.)	Undecided
67.	Renaldo Woolridge	SF	6-7/200	Harvard-Westlake (North Hollywood, Calif.)	Undecided
68.	Darnell Wilks	SF	6-8/200	Pioneer Christian Academy (Nashville)	Cincinnati



No. 59 Clarence Trent

An overpowering athlete who can impose his will on a game, Trent transferred to prep school for his senior season. He is known as a player who can be a handful; he can be a bit moody on the floor. Trent needs to find an offensive game, but his energy level is so high that many programs are pursuing him.

Stocking up

These programs already have multiple commitments from the top 99:

Ohio State No. 10 B.J. Mullens, No. 15 William Buford, No. 25 Luke Babbitt, No. 55 Anthony Crater.

UCLA No. 20 Drew Gordon, No. 23 Malcolm Lee, No. 33 Jerime Anderson.

Arizona No. 4 Brandon Jennings, No. 27 Emmanuel Ngedu.

Cincinnati No. 30 Yancy Gates, No. 68 Darnell Wilks.

Georgetown No. 44 Chris Braswell, No. 65 Henry Sims.

Indiana No. 49 Eshaunte Jones, No. 54 Bud Mackey.

Michigan State No. 6 Delvon Roe, No. 45 Korie Lucious.

No. 73 Eloy Vargas

Scouts were disappointed Vargas did not make greater improvement in his junior season, but he still has height and length and can be a presence around the basket because of his athleticism. He hits face-up shots and is skilled enough to finish in traffic, though he's inconsistent because a lack of strength allows him to be knocked around. He'll never be a strong post-up player. Vargas will be a shot blocker, though, mostly as a help defender.



No. 90 Olu Ashaolu

The brother of Duquesne forward Sam Ashaolu, Olu is a muscular, powerful workhorse who can help bring a physical edge to the Rutgers frontcourt. He is not a great shooter or post player, but he can dribble the ball in the lane and create scoring opportunities for himself. Coaches admire his drive and believe he eventually will be able to play multiple positions.

No. 95 Nick Williams

Although 6-4, Williams' jump shot probably isn't reliable enough for him to project as a shooting guard. He is viewed as more of a scorer than a shooter, an excellent athlete with toughness and a taste for defense. He uses his strength to survive as an inside player for his high school team but will move comfortably to the wing when he suits up for Marquette.

Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht./Wt.	High school	College commitment
69.	Phillip Jurick	C	6-9/245	East Ridge (Chattanooga, Tenn.)	Tennessee
70.	Kevin Jones	PF	6-7/205	Mount Vernon (N.Y.)	Undecided
71.	LaRon Dendy	SF	6-8/190	Hope Christian Academy (Kings Mountain, N.C.)	Undecided
72.	Nasir Robinson	SF	6-4/185	Chester (Pa.)	Pitt
73.	Eloy Vargas	C	6-9/220	American Heritage (Plantation, Fla.)	Undecided
74.	Dash Harris	PG	6-0/170	Montverde (Fla.) Academy	Undecided
75.	J.T. Thompson	SF	6-7/195	Hope Christian Academy (King's Mountain, N.C.)	Virginia Tech
76.	Murphy Holloway	SF	6-7/185	Dutch Fork (Irmo, S.C.)	Undecided
77.	Latavious Williams	C	6-10/210	Starkville (Miss.)	Undecided
78.	Draymond Green	SF	6-7/215	Saginaw (Mich.)	Undecided
79.	Tyrese Breshers	PF	6-7/220	Price (Los Angeles)	Undecided
80.	Ray Shipman	SG	6-4/190	Monsignor Pace (Opa Locka, Fla.)	Undecided
81.	Matt Humphrey	SG	6-5/180	Hales Franciscan (Chicago)	Undecided
82.	Rashanti Harris	C	6-9/225	New Hope (Columbus, Miss.)	Undecided
83.	Isaiah Thomas	PG	5-8/160	South Kent (Conn.) Prep	Undecided
84.	Wesley Witherspoon	SF	6-7/196	Berkmar (Lilburn, Ga.)	Undecided
85.	John Brandenburg	C	6-10/220	DeSmet (St. Louis)	Undecided
86.	Rotnei Clarke	SG	6-1/175	Verdigris (Claremore, Okla.)	Undecided
87.	Jared Swopshire	SF	6-7/190	Pendleton School (Bradenton, Fla.)	Undecided
88.	Elston Turner	SG	6-4/185	Roseville (Calif.)	Washington
89.	Malcolm White	PF	6-8/215	Genesis One Prep (Mendenhall, Miss.)	Mississippi
90.	Olu Ashaolu	SF	6-7/200	Christian Life Center (Humble, Texas)	Rutgers
91.	Paul Williams	SG	6-3/185	Renaissance (Detroit)	Undecided
92.	Victor Davila	PF	6-8/210	Starmont (Boonville, N.C.)	Undecided
93.	Jared Berggren	C	6-10/240	Princeton (Minn.)	Wisconsin
94.	Phillip McDonald	SG	6-5/195	Cypress Springs (Houston)	Undecided
95.	Nick Williams	SG	6-4/180	Leflore (Mobile, Ala.)	Marquette
96.	Jeremiah Kelly	SG	6-2/180	Boys to Men Academy (Chicago)	Undecided
97.	Melquan Bolding	SG	6-5/200	Archbishop Stepinac (White Plains, N.Y.)	Louisville
98.	Josh Crittle	PF	6-8/235	Hales Franciscan (Chicago)	Undecided
99.	Jarrett Mann	SG	6-4/190	Middletown (Del.)	Stanford

Heating up

These guys are climbing up the list:

No. 2 Ed Davis Already a top 10 prospect, Davis shot even higher with an impressive head-to-head performance against No. 1 Greg Monroe in the spring Boo Williams Invitational.

No. 12 Ty Walker

No. 19 Tyler Zeller

No. 33 Jerime Anderson

No. 38 Iman Shumpert

No. 62 Kemba Walker

Cooling down

After early raves, their ratings are dropping. There's still time to fix that:

No. 30 Yancy Gates

No. 41 Larry Drew

No. 55 Anthony Crater

No. 87 Jared Swopshire

Unranked SG Malik Story

The summer hoops circuit is about to heat up, and we've got it covered. Mike DeCourcy will report from the major camps, and you can find updated rankings and news throughout the summer. Go to sportingnews.com/cbasketball.

A couple of

NHL The Niedermayers made the Cup finals a family affair, but Anaheim's win really was a testament to old-time hockey
By Kara Yorio

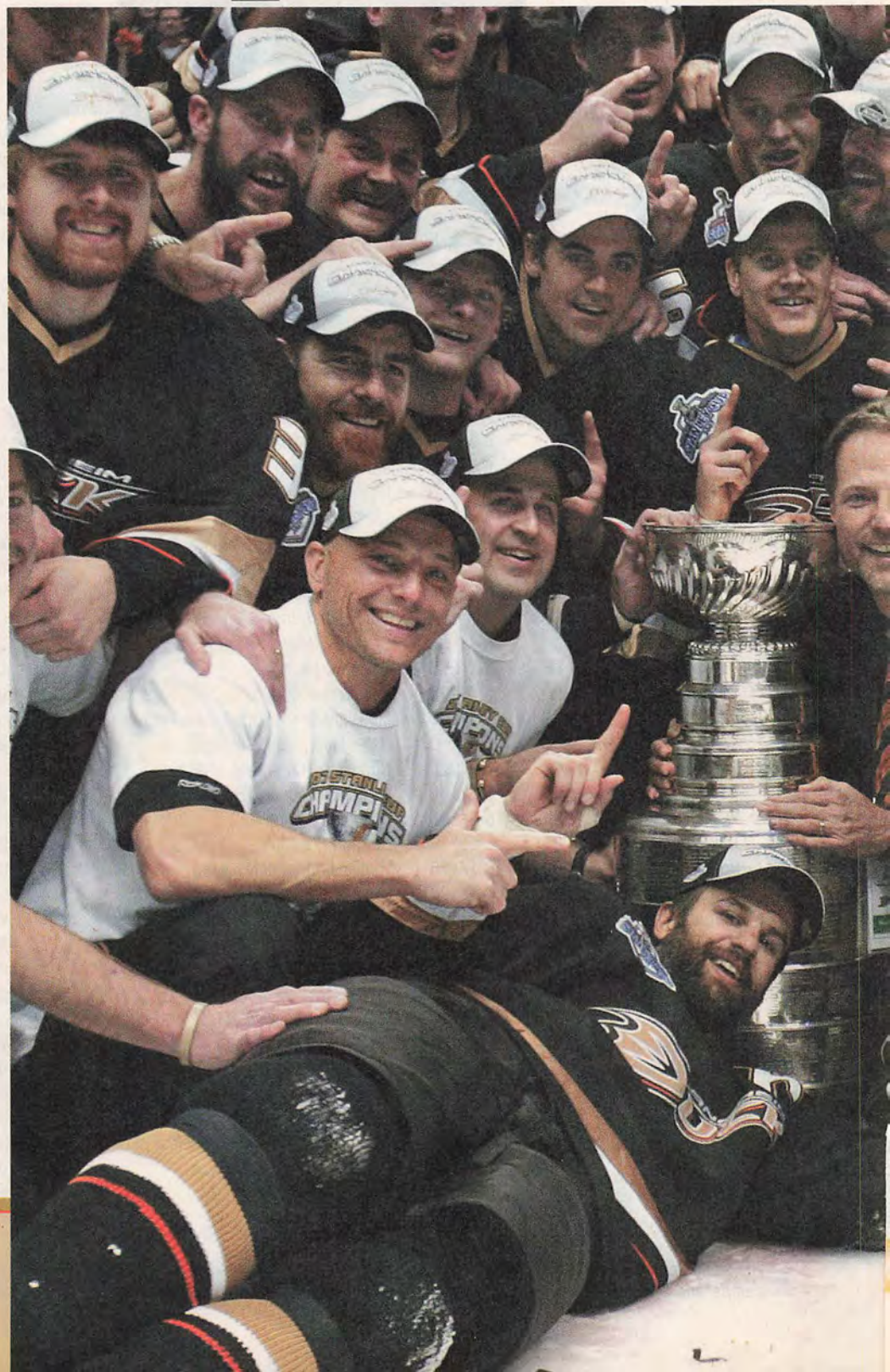
Every playoff season is filled with jaw-dropping goals, unbelievable plays, astounding saves and gut-wrenching hits, both the clean and controversial brand. And every hockey spring culminates with the final snapshot of that big silver trophy held aloft by members of a team that persevered and earned the right to call itself the Stanley Cup champion.

On Anaheim's Honda Center ice last Wednesday night, after the Ducks had dispatched the Senators in a five-game Stanley Cup finals, the lasting image was of two brothers sharing the moment of a lifetime.

Ducks captain Scott Niedermayer accepted the Cup from commissioner Gary Bettman, held it over his head briefly, gave it a kiss and nodded toward his brother, Rob, a Ducks forward. For Scott, this was the fourth Cup; for Rob, the precious first. Rob grabbed his older brother by the jersey, shook him and accepted the Stanley Cup.

"It's the best feeling I've had in my career, and it's probably the best feeling I'll ever have," Rob told the *Los Angeles Daily News*. "To have Scott pass me the Cup, it was just outstanding."

After the pass, Scott sent Rob on his way, instructing him to skate around the ice with it—a longstanding tradition that is repeated over and over as the Cup is passed from one player to another.



The brothers Niedermayer were down, but certainly not out, when all was said and done in the Stanley Cup finals.

throwbacks



It passed from Rob to Chris Pronger to Teemu Selanne, the sentimental favorite, and on down the line. But that first handoff was the most meaningful.

Two summers ago, Scott signed with Anaheim so he could play on a winning team with his brother. He wanted to help Rob fulfill the dream he had realized himself three times with the Devils. But for the brothers to win a championship together, and for Scott to pass the Cup to Rob—that was something neither could have imagined, even in their wildest, dreamiest days of youth.

“You never dream of passing it to your brother,” said Scott Niedermayer, who won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the playoff MVP. “I never had. To be able to do that is definitely the highlight of my career.”

After the trophy had taken its mandatory laps, the team gathered for a photograph. Scott slid on the ice onto his right side in front of his grouped teammates; Rob did likewise from the other side. The Stanley Cup, surrounded by the rest of the Ducks, sat just behind their heads.

That photo will command a special spot in the Niedermayer family album. But teams around the league will be studying other faces in that hockey crowd. Call it the copycat theory: Twenty-nine teams really do look at the winner's approach and try to emulate it.

“Absolutely,” says Bruins general manager Peter Chiarelli, who adds this note of caution: “The risk is if you take too much, you don’t have the personnel and fall on your face. (But) you look at the trends and the reason for their success.”

Chiarelli just finished his first season as Boston's G.M. He previously worked as an assistant to G.M. John Muckler in Ottawa, where he helped build the Senators team that lost to the Ducks in the finals. Chiarelli says the Senators took cues from 2006 Eastern Conference finalists Carolina and Buffalo.

“We tried to have the mobile defenseman and one top line like the two finalists,” says Chiarelli, referring to Ottawa's game plan.

There aren't many similarities between the

PAUL CHASSON / AP



Ducks and the Hurricanes, the 2006 Stanley Cup winners and the first champions of the postlockout NHL. Perhaps that's because the Ducks really didn't need to emulate anyone; they enjoyed a special situation in terms of personnel.

"It's pretty unique to have two of maybe the top four defensemen in the league," Chiarelli says, referring to Scott Niedermayer and Pronger. "That's why you have to be careful (emulating)."

So, in addition to two elite blue liners, what was Anaheim's winning formula?

The Ducks had veteran leadership with Scott Niedermayer, Pronger and Selanne. They had powerful, talented young players in center Ryan Getzlaf, left wing Dustin Penner and right wing Corey Perry. They had a good goaltending duo in Jean-Sebastien Giguere and Ilya Bryzgalov. They had an outstanding checking line with Samuel Pahlsson centering Travis Moen and Rob Niedermayer. And beyond Scott Niedermayer and Pronger, their defense included Francois Beauchemin, who enjoyed a breakthrough season, veteran Sean O'Donnell and a few younger players who contributed when needed.

Rob Niedermayer's Game 5 goal baffled Ottawa goalie Ray Emery and made title-hungry Anaheim feel mighty, mighty good.

DAVE SANFORD / AP

See you next year

Five teams to watch in 2007-08

Ducks. I know, I know, nobody repeats anymore—it's just too difficult. But this team makes you want to believe. It has great young talent, veterans who are not heading off to retirement (with the possible exception of Teemu Selanne) and two good goalies.

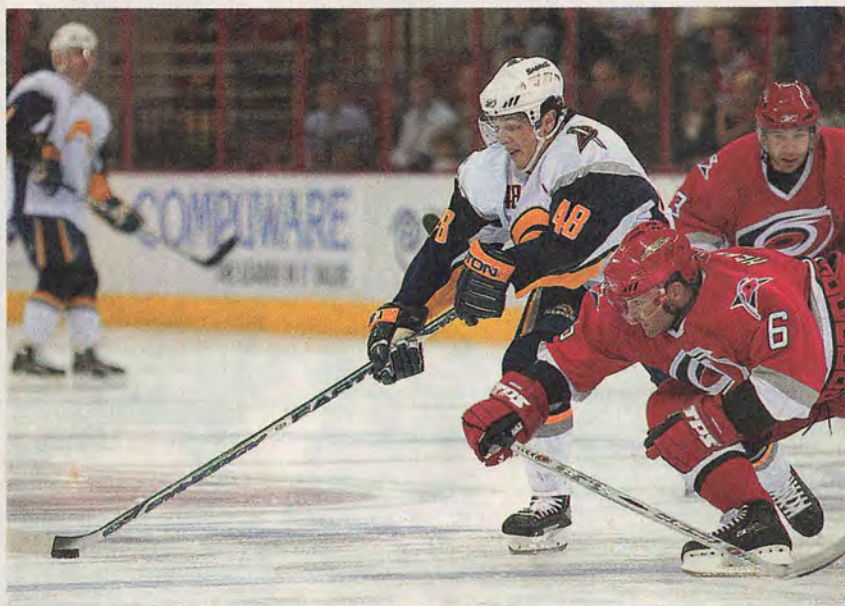


Crosby

Sharks. When will San Jose live up to its vast potential and get to a Stanley Cup final? With another playoff lesson learned, next season could be the one. If not, the Sharks still should be fun to watch.

Penguins. Pittsburgh, now with playoff experience, might be the popular pick to come out of the East. If goalie Marc-Andre Fleury continues to develop, the Penguins can just let Captain Kid—aka Sidney Crosby—lead the way.

Senators. It's always easy to pick a



Sabres. This team obviously will be much better if it re-signs both **Daniel Briere** and Chris Drury. But even with one of them, the Sabres will have depth, speed and a goaltender with more playoff lessons to draw from.

team that fell just short the previous season. But this is a very good club that needs only a little more depth and tough physical play to make the outcome of next season's finals different from this year's. —K.Y.

BOB LEVERONE / SN (2)



Their coach, Randy Carlyle, instilled discipline and introduced a successful system. They played tough, physical hockey and had depth and balanced scoring. As a group, they also had the necessary desire.

"Anaheim is a hell of a team," Ottawa coach Bryan Murray says. "They did what they had to do to win it."

Ken Hitchcock, who coached a Cup winner for the Stars in 1999 and now is trying to coach the Blue Jackets into relevancy, says a key for the Ducks was their line-matching strategy.

Early in the playoffs, when the opposition's top forward line was on the ice, the Ducks sent out the Pahlsson line with two specific defensemen. In the finals, those defenders most often were Scott Niedermayer and Pronger, who had the obvious goal of shutting down Ottawa's high-scoring Dany Heatley-Jason Spezza-Daniel Alfredsson line.

Another important element of Anaheim's game plan was the specific assignments given to each player.

"To me, the teams like my Dallas teams, the Jersey teams, the way Anaheim plays, it's the way the Canadiens played in the '70s—there is definition to who does what job," Hitchcock says.

Every team, of course, needs the skill guys who can put the puck in the net, but teams can't have 10 or 11 forwards who are exactly the same—no matter how skilled. Even in a league putting a premium on speed, skill and goal scoring, there can be too much of a good thing. Role players are a must. Offensive contributions from every line are vital. Everybody must know

The Ducks' game plan almost seems contradictory in today's NHL, where physical play is disappearing and shorthanded situations are being avoided at all costs.

his job, accept it and work together toward the same goal the same way.

"Their skill players and physical players were all on the same page," says Chiarelli.

A big part of the Ducks' job descriptions was to hit and hit hard. This was not a team that backed down from a battle in the corner or a fight at center ice. This was not a bunch of goons—just tough hockey players who didn't mind getting themselves in the middle of the action.

The Ducks, who led the league in regular-season penalties, didn't change their style for the playoffs. That game plan almost seems contradictory in today's NHL, where physical play is disappearing and going shorthanded is being avoided at all costs. More penalties are being called, and too many shorthanded situations can crush a team.

Maybe that's the real lesson Anaheim taught the rest of the league in the playoffs: With the right discipline, personnel and system, a tough, physical game still is possible and can be successful.

Hitchcock never doubted that.

"When you have a team that's not afraid to take penalties and can be comfortable being uncomfortable, that's the only way you can win," he says. "You have to play close to the edge if you expect to win."

The Ducks played close to, on and even over that edge sometimes, a curious strategy in a league that increasingly seems to be more about breakaways than man-to-man battles.

"As much as the game has changed, especially with the hooking and holding, a lot is the same," says Hitchcock. "You get a great sense of pride that the things that mattered then still matter now. The most competitive players on the deepest team win."

This year, those players were the Anaheim Ducks.

SN



PAUL CHASSON / AP (2)

'When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering in it. Yet at the 101st blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that

A rock-solid dynasty

NBA The secrets to the Spurs' success are so simple it's a wonder anyone tries to win this thing any other way
By Johnny Ludden

Photos by Bob Leverone / SN

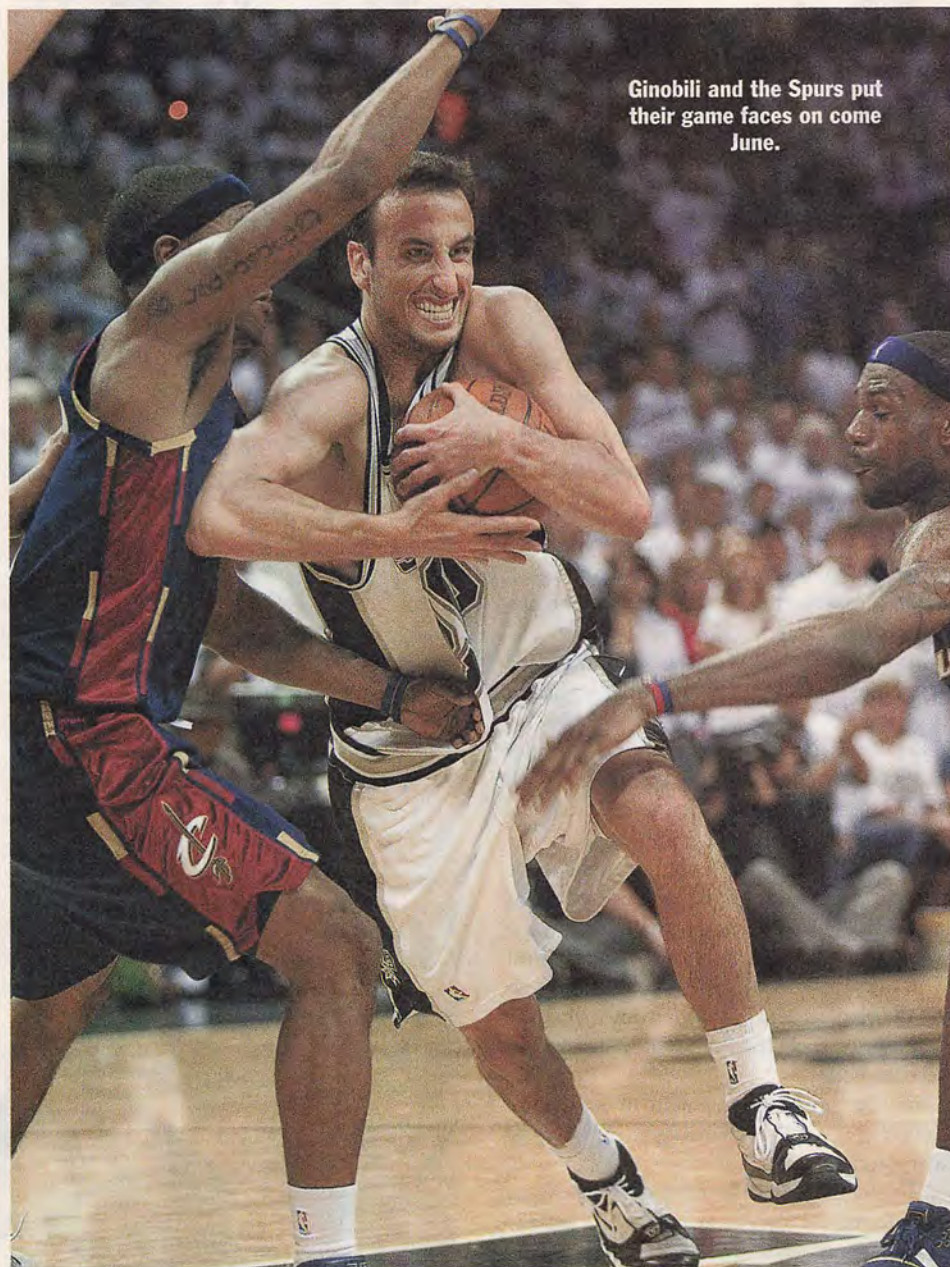
If you want to know why the Spurs are dominating the Cavaliers in The Finals, why they entered the week within two victories of claiming their fourth championship since 1999 and third in five years, why no other major U.S. professional sports franchise has a higher winning percentage over the past decade, Tim Duncan will point you to the it's-the-end-result-that-matters wisdom of 19th century social reformer Jacob Riis.

Riis' words are displayed in a large frame hanging in a corner of the Spurs' locker room, just to the right of Duncan's stall. They have been there since the AT&T Center opened nearly five years ago, and they were in the team's locker room at the Alamodome the day Duncan joined the Spurs in 1997. Spanish, French, Serbian and Turkish translations of the quote line the hallway leading to the court, a reflection not only of the team's international pedigree but also of the importance Spurs coach Gregg Popovich has placed on the words.

The stonecutter hammering away at his rock has been Popovich's mantra for more than a decade now. Division titles, playoff seeds, the best record at the All-Star break—none of that really matters to the Spurs.

This season, San Antonio limped through January while the Mavericks and Suns surged to the top of the standings. The Spurs looked tired and old, former champions trudging toward retirement instead of a title. Through it all he continued to preach the same five words to his players: *Worry only about getting better.*

Steadied by Duncan and fueled by the frenetic play of guards Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili, the Spurs are now closing in on



Ginobili and the Spurs put their game faces on come June.

another championship. It wasn't a midseason trade that galvanized the team, just the same keep-chipping-away strategy the Spurs have always employed.

"The whole message is about the journey," Duncan says. "It's about learning things along the way and continuing to learn from things along the way, so you keep beating on that rock."

Listen carefully to that beating and you can almost hear the secrets of the Spurs' enduring success.

Remember the big picture

Cavs general manager Danny Ferry, who played three seasons for the Spurs and later worked in their front office, says no coaches are

away at his rock, perhaps 100 times without as much as a crack showing blow that did it but all that had gone on before.' —*Jacob Riis*

more attuned to the nuances of the season and the needs of their teams than Popovich and the Lakers' Phil Jackson. To Popovich, wins and losses in December don't matter as much as the progress—or lack of it—the team shows.

"That's hard," Ferry says, "because most coaches have to think game to game."

Former Spurs center Will Perdue, an analyst for ESPN Radio, remembers that after Popovich fired Bob Hill and named himself coach early in the 1996-97 season, he had an agenda for every game that didn't hinge on whether the team won. Even as the Spurs careened to a 20-62 record, Popovich continued to stress day-to-day improvement.

"We were in Utah in the regular season and we're getting burned by the screen-and-roll. Smoked," Perdue says. "At halftime, I wasn't trying to be disrespectful or anything, but I raised my hand and said, 'Coach, we're not doing that very well. Can we change up what we're doing?'"

"He went off. He was like, 'No! That's what we're going to work on. I don't care how many times we get beat. That's what we have to do to get better.'"

Pace yourself

Few NBA teams practice as little as the Spurs. San Antonio has the league's oldest roster and a core that has been together for at least four seasons, so Popovich is mindful of not wearing out the team during the regular season.

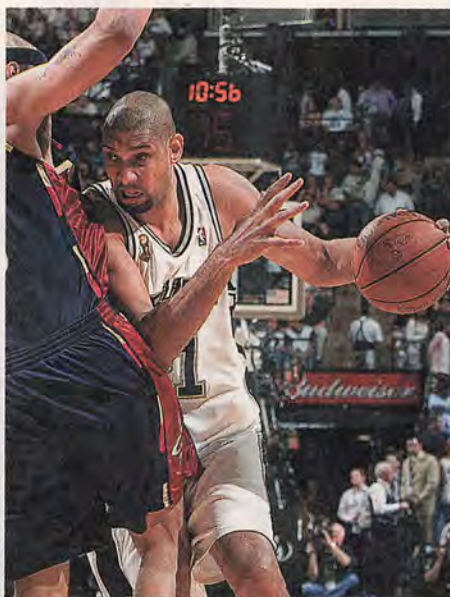
Not one player—not even the 25-year-old Parker—averaged 35 minutes this season. Popovich held 36-year-old Robert Horry out of the second game of back-to-backs to keep him as fresh as possible for the playoffs. He played Ginobili in 6- to 8-minute bursts to prevent him from getting tired late in games.

"I think we were preparing for this moment, believe it or not, throughout the whole regular season," guard Michael Finley says. "He didn't overemphasize the importance of every game, knowing that at one point we'll have to buckle down and get into a good rhythm. I think because of that we came into the postseason fresh. Lack of energy should never be an excuse for us."

Never stop adjusting

Because the Spurs aren't overly concerned with their regular-season record, Popovich repeatedly juggles his rotation until he finds a combination with which he feels comfortable.

The coach opened this season with Beno Udrih as his backup point guard, gave the job to



Handle the rock, shoot the rock—even beat the rock—Duncan can do it all.

Jacque Vaughn, went back to Udrih and then finally settled on Vaughn because he thought the team benefited more from Vaughn's toughness and energy.

Fabricio Oberto and Francisco Elson played hot potato with the starting center job all season before Oberto grabbed hold of it by averaging 10.2 points and 7.8 rebounds in the Western Conference finals against the Jazz.

And Popovich's most important lineup change came late in January, when he moved Ginobili to the bench to bolster the team's reserve unit. Brent Barry replaced him in the

starting lineup, then Finley settled into a rhythm after replacing Barry, and Ginobili's talent and energy created mismatches for opposing reserves.

Focus on defense

Popovich's defense-first philosophy has helped build the foundation for the Spurs' success. He looks for players willing to defend and work within the team's system. If they aren't, they don't play. As a result, the Spurs usually lean on their defense to pull them through the season's early months while the coaches slowly add to the offense. San Antonio runs a lot of motion in its offense, and it usually takes time for new players to get comfortable in the read-and-react system.

"If you wanted to win every game out of the gate, maybe you'd be calling plays every time," Spurs assistant coach Mike Budenholzer says. "But we have our system and we believe in it. Even if we start slowly, we don't go away from it."

All of which brings the Spurs back to Jacob Riis. Former Spurs center David Robinson embraced the mantra when he helped Duncan lead the team to titles in 1999 and 2003. Robinson couldn't help but recall Riis' words as he watched this season's team finally gain some traction, as it traditionally does, after the All-Star break.

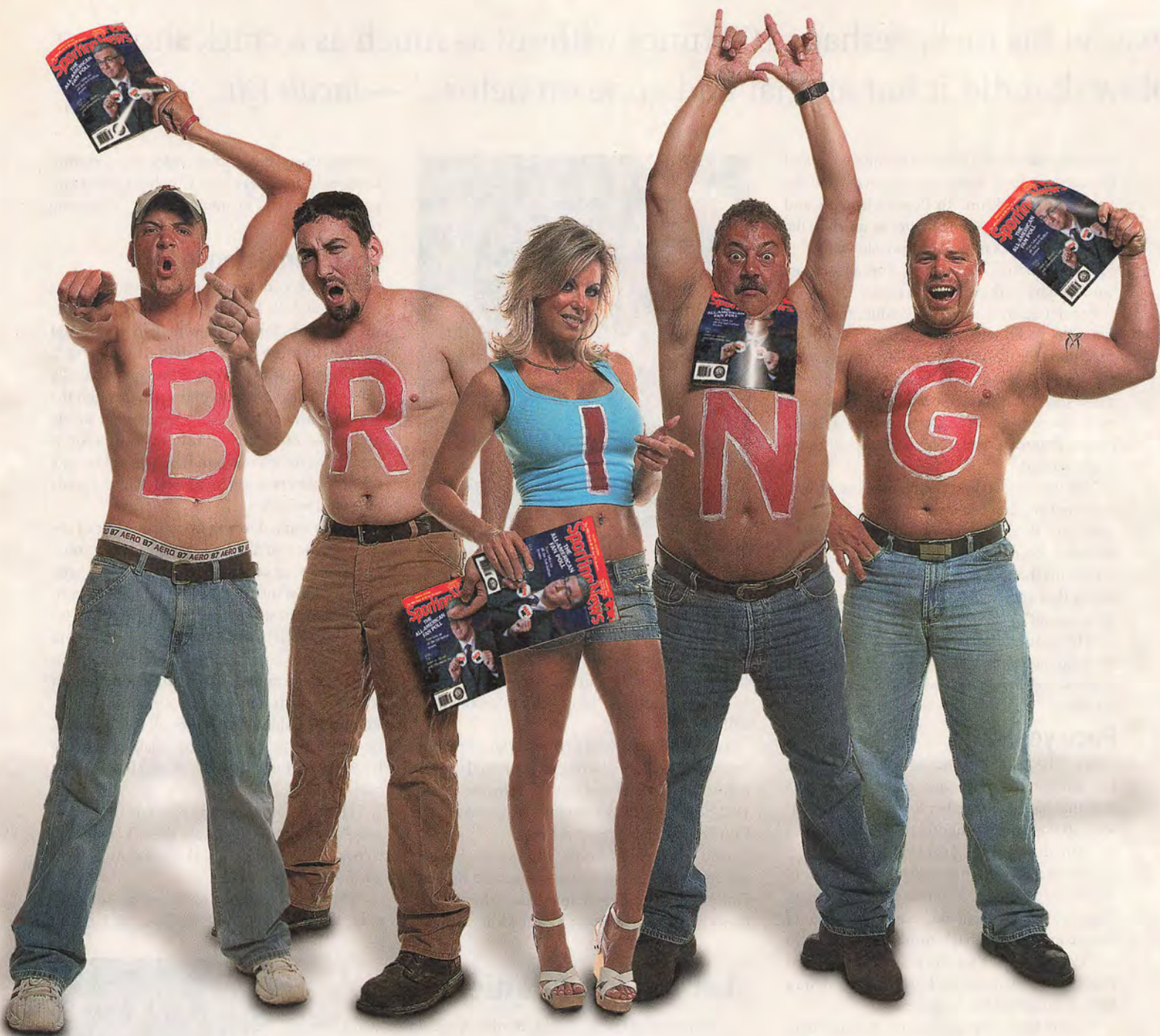
"They just kept plodding through," Robinson says. "Their motto has always been, 'We're going to beat on the rock until it cracks.' And that's what they did this year."

"They've been beating on it, and here they are at the verge of accomplishing their goal." **SN**

LeBron has (a little) help

Welcome to the spotlight, Boobie. Cavs point guard Daniel Gibson spent the entire regular season playing like a rookie—flashing an equal mix of potential and inexperience—but suddenly holds the key to the team's championship hopes. OK, LeBron James holds *the* key, but Gibson is the doorstop that could keep the Spurs from blowing the Cavs off their hinges. He averaged 18.0 points during Cleveland's four wins against the Pistons in the Eastern Conference finals and 15.5 in the first two games against the Spurs. "This kid is going to be the steal of the second round," says an Eastern Conference scout. "He has good court presence, intelligence and skills. He's a very good shooter and slasher." Gibson, 21, played just two years at Texas and has work to do to become a consistent NBA player. "He needs to work on ballhandling and decision making to be a true point guard," the scout says. "I love his toughness and defense. He has shown poise beyond his years." —*Ryan Fagan*





We can't dunk. Our 30 time is over 5.0. But we are sports experts. Are you, too? Let's not discount the possibility.

Because we know you are as passionate about sports as we are, we thought it



would be a Prince Fielder-sized blast to square off—us against you—in a test of prognosticative ability. Get ready to read a bushel of predictions for the coming year—ours and yours,

made in the latter case over the past three weeks at sportingnews.com.

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Photos by Albert Dickson / SN

It's a team thing



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Who will win the A.L. Central?

Us: 48% say Indians

You: 54% say Tigers

> The Tigers are edged out by one vote on our staff; both sides give 8% to the defending champion Twins.



JAY DROWNS / SN

Who will win the N.L. Central?

Us: 75% say Brewers

You: 68% say Brewers

> Both sides like the controversy-added Cubs second-best, at 13%.

DID YOU KNOW? Not only is Milwaukee going for its first division title and postseason appearance in 25 years—it has a whopping *one* second-place finish in that span.

Will the Yankees make the playoffs for the 13th straight year?

Us: 78% say NO!

You: 76% say NO!



AL ROKER'S PREDICTION

No. It's all over. They're not going to make the playoffs unless aliens abduct Boston and a few other teams. It's sad, but I think their spirit is broken at this point.

ED BETZ / AP



ELISE AMENDOLA / AP

Will the Mets

win the N.L. pennant?

Us: 68% say YES!

You: 56% say NO!

Will the Red Sox win 100 games?

Us: 78% say YES!

You: 54% say YES!



DID YOU KNOW? Last season was the first time in six years the big leagues didn't have a 100-game winner.



JAY DROWNS / SN

Which NFL semifinalist from last season will take the biggest tumble?

Us: 73% say bad news, Bears

You: 63% say Bears, too

> SN has serious confidence—zero tumble votes—in the Patriots, and only 3% of you disagree.

Will USC win the BCS title?

Us: 65% say NO!

You: 74% say NO!



CARSON PALMER'S PREDICTION

Without a doubt—of course they will. This kid coming in, Joe McKnight, is supposed to be the next Reggie Bush. With John David Booty at quarterback, the O-line they always have and the defense they're going to have, this team is loaded. They get the top recruiting class every year, so there's always a whole bunch of good players. Plus, any time you've got UCLA on your schedule, that's a guaranteed win.



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

Will the Colts win Super Bowl 42?

Us: 100% say NO!

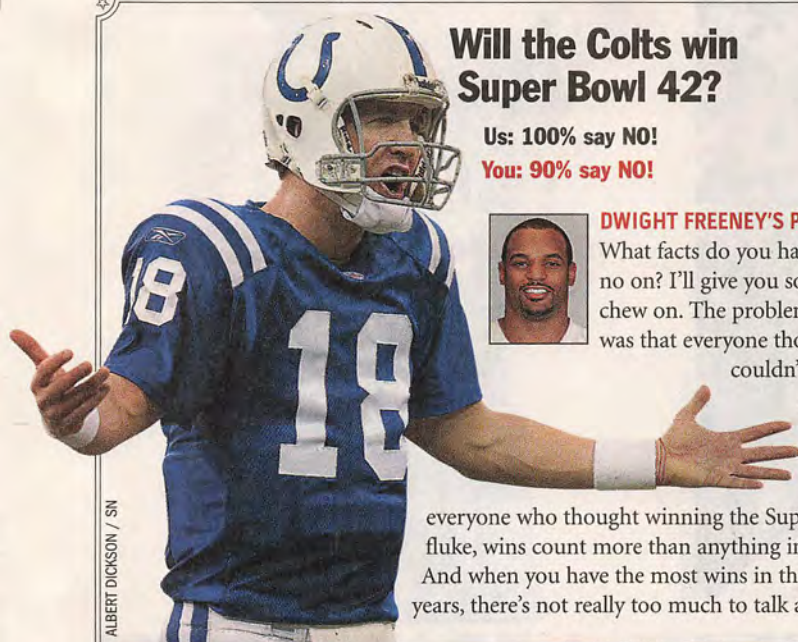
You: 90% say NO!



DWIGHT FREENEY'S PREDICTION

What facts do you have to base your no on? I'll give you some facts to chew on. The problem in years past was that everyone thought we couldn't win the big game. Well, we finally won that big game. For

everyone who thought winning the Super Bowl was a fluke, wins count more than anything in this league. And when you have the most wins in the last five years, there's not really too much to talk about.



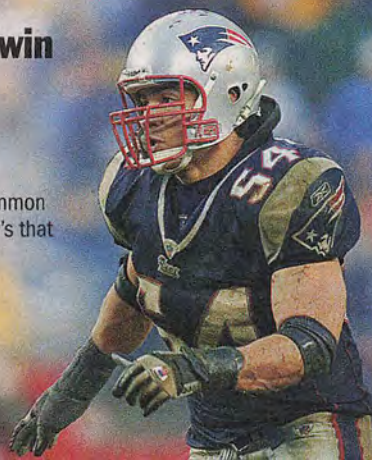
ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Will the Patriots win Super Bowl 42?

Us: 71% say NO!

You: 65% say NO!

> The Pats are still the most common pick on staff to win the title. How's that for hedging our bets?



JAY DROWNS / SN

How many games will Notre Dame win?

Us: 48% say 7 or fewer

You: 63% say 8 or 9

> More reason for Irish fans to think it's them against the world: Just 7% of you think ND will win at least 10.



BOB DAVIE'S PREDICTION Notre Dame will win eight or nine games. I don't know what they're thinking at quarterback with Brady Quinn gone, but I think they'll be more run-oriented and play-action pass-oriented. The defense is switching to a 3-4, but the front won't matter unless the secondary improves. There were too many blown coverages last year.

Keeping score

Over the next 12 months, we'll see who's got the goods. We'll tally the results from this year's questions and include them in next year's All-American Fan Poll.

■ Correct answers will be worth five points apiece.

■ If both sides are correct, whichever side has a higher percentage of correct votes will receive an additional two points.

■ If both sides are incorrect, whichever side has a higher percentage of correct votes will receive two points.

Will a non-BCS team crash the BCS party?

Us: 68% say NO!

You: 53% say make some room (again), big boys



JOE JASZEWSKI / IDAHO STATESMAN

Will Duke be a top 10 basketball team again?

Us: 55% say NO!

You: 56% say YES!



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Will North Carolina reach the 2008 Final Four?

Us: 73% say YES!

You: 62% say YES!



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Which school will win the most combined games in football and basketball, Ohio State or Florida?

Us: 58% say go, Gators

You: 56% say Gators, too

DID YOU KNOW? The Gators had more wins in the past school year—a combined 48-6 record to the Buckeyes' 47-5—but the Buckos had a better winning percentage! Now, about those championships ...



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

It's a players game

How many home runs will A-Rod hit?

Us: 50% say 50-59

You: 57% say 40-49

> A run at the record book? No way: Zero staffers—and only 4% of you—see 60 or more taters on No. 13's final stat line.



SAMMY SOSA'S PREDICTION

With the way he's going and the approach that he's taking, I think he'll hit 50. He might get to 60, but you have to get 50 first. Everybody would like to be hitting like A-Rod—but only one guy can be A-Rod.

When will Barry Bonds hit No. 756?

Us: 75% say after the All-Star break

You: 59% say after the All-Star break

> 6% of you wishful thinkers/smarty-pantses say never.

Who will be the N.L. home run king?

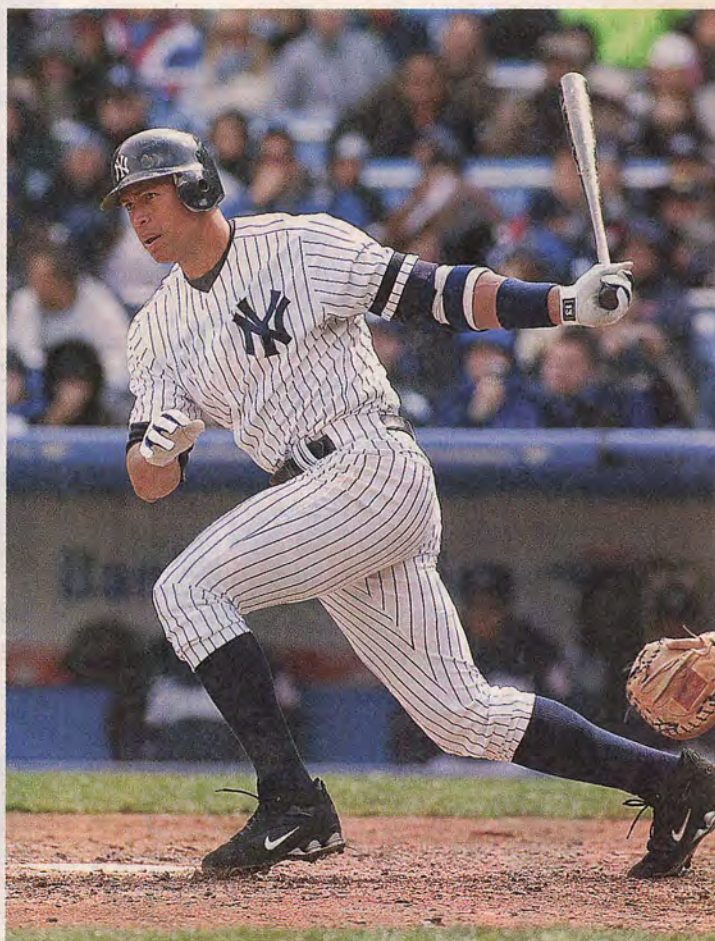
Us: 33% say Prince Fielder

You: 29% say Cecil's kid, too

> You like Adam Dunn (21%) next, and so do we (20%).



JAY DROWNS / SN



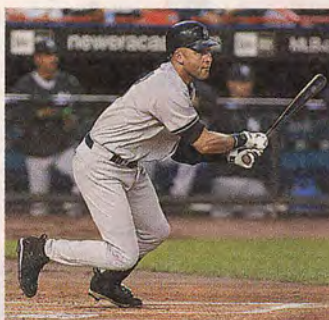
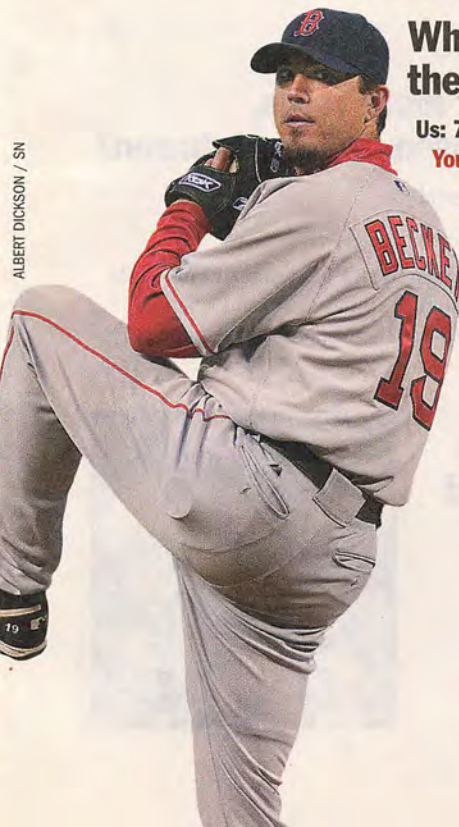
JOHN DUNN FOR SN (2)

Which pitcher will lead the Red Sox in wins?

Us: 75% say Josh Beckett

You: 69% say Beckett

> Dice-K—is he still a surefire star?—gets 20% from us and 16% from you.



If the Yankees somehow make the playoffs, who will have better post-season numbers, A-Rod or Derek Jeter?

Us: 78% say Jeter

You: 71% say Jeter

DID YOU KNOW? A-Rod's career ALCS average blows away the can-do-no-wrong Jeter's—.315 (54 at-bats) to .262 (168).

Will Roger Clemens pitch like Roger Clemens?

Us: 65% say NO!

You: 63% say NO!



RALPH FRANCELLO / AP

Who will win the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup?

Us: 58% say Jeff Gordon

You: 52% say Gordo, too

> All but 18% of you and (gulp) 13% of us may be guilty of overlooking Jimmie Johnson—yet again.



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

Where will Dale Earnhardt Jr. land?

Us: 48% say Richard Childress Racing

You: 32% say RCR, too

> You give Hendrick Motorsports (29%) a better shot than we do (18%).

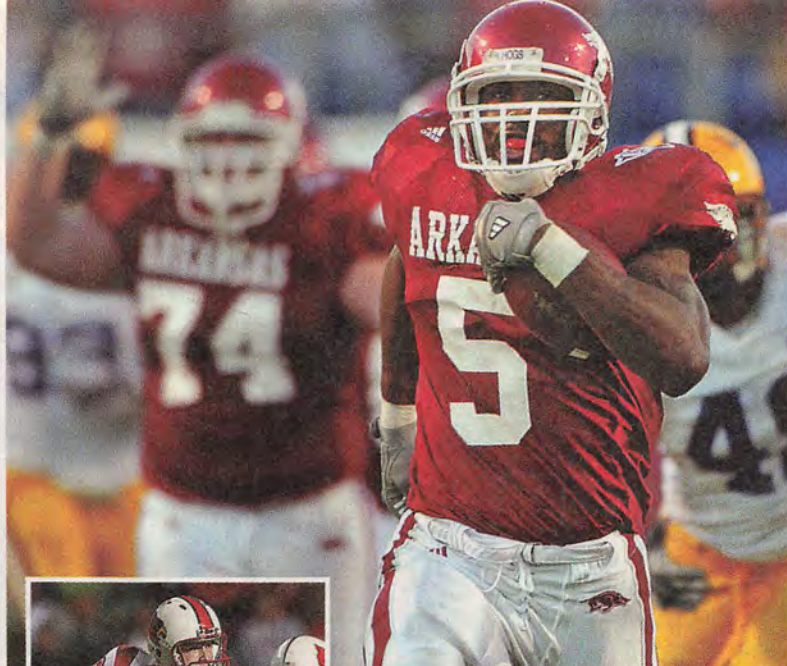
Will super-recruit Jimmy Clausen be Notre Dame's primary starting quarterback?

Us: 63% say YES!

You: 61% say YES!



JOE RAYMOND / AP



DAVID QUINN / AP; BROHM INSET BY DREW HALLOWELL FOR SN



Who will win the Heisman Trophy?

Us: 33% say Louisville QB Brian Brohm

You: 31% say Arkansas RB Darren McFadden

> D-Mac falls one vote shy of Brohm with us; you're pretty split on Brohm (20%) and USC slinger John David Booty (18%).



DESMOND HOWARD'S PREDICTION Darren McFadden has to be the favorite, but playing in the SEC is tough. One or two bad games could knock him off, and it will be vital that Arkansas' passing develops to take some heat off him. West Virginia's Steve Slaton has an electric running style. Hawaii's Colt Brennan will put up big numbers, but I don't think he'll get enough exposure. McFadden will win it.

Who will rush for more yards, LaDainian Tomlinson or Larry Johnson?

Us: 85% say it's still L.T.'s world

You: 81% say L.T., too

DID YOU KNOW? In his first 48 games, L.J. has fewer rushing yards (4,205 to 4,564) but more rushing TDs (47 to 37) and a better yards-per-carry average (4.7 to 4.5) than L.T. did at the same point in his career.

Will Randy Moss get onto the field as a Patriots starter and stay there?

Us: 95% say YES!

You: 84% say YES!

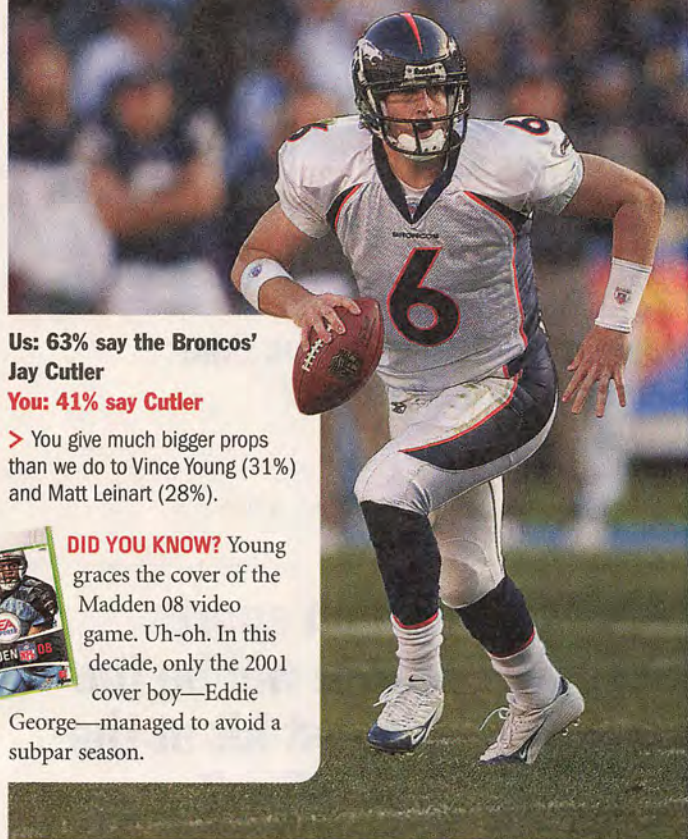


STEPHAN Savoia / AP

Will Michael Vick be better or worse under Bobby Petrino than he was under Jim Mora?

Us: 63% say worse
You: 52% say better

Which NFL sophomore quarterback will win the most games?



Us: 63% say the Broncos' Jay Cutler
You: 41% say Cutler

> You give much bigger props than we do to Vince Young (31%) and Matt Leinart (28%).



DID YOU KNOW? Young graces the cover of the Madden 08 video game. Uh-oh. In this decade, only the 2001 cover boy—Eddie

George—managed to avoid a subpar season.

TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

Who will be the NFL offensive rookie of the year?

Us: 50% say Vikings RB Adrian Peterson
You: 40% say A-Pete, too

> Latest Lions wideout Calvin Johnson is next on our list and yours (both at 28%).



WESLEY HITT / GETTY IMAGES

Who will be the NFL defensive rookie of the year?

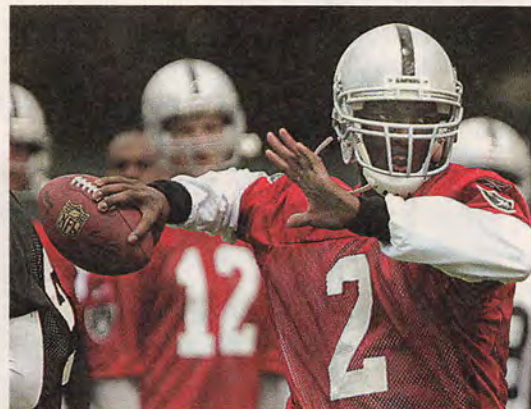
Us: 20% say Bucs DE Gaines Adams
You: 20% say Texans DT Amobi Okoye

> We're also pretty big on Okoye (15%), Jamaal Anderson (13%) and LaRon Landry (13%); you almost gave Adams (19%) or Landry (18%) the nod.

How many games will JaMarcus Russell start for the Raiders?

Us: 65% say 8 or more
You: 57% say 8 or more

> None of us and only 1% of you—we won't mention any names, Josh McCown—say the big fella won't start a single game.



BEN MARGOT / AP

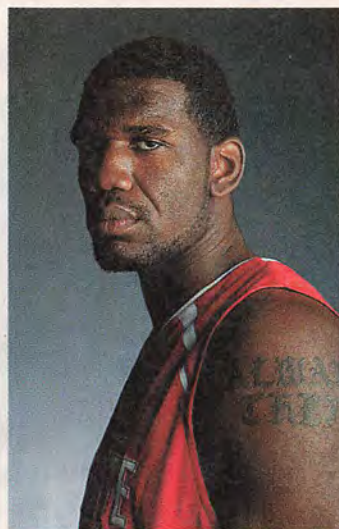
Who will be the 2007-08 NBA rookie of the year?

Us: 45% say Greg Oden
You: 47% say Kevin Durant

> You have more "other"-voting contrarians (22%) than we do (13%).



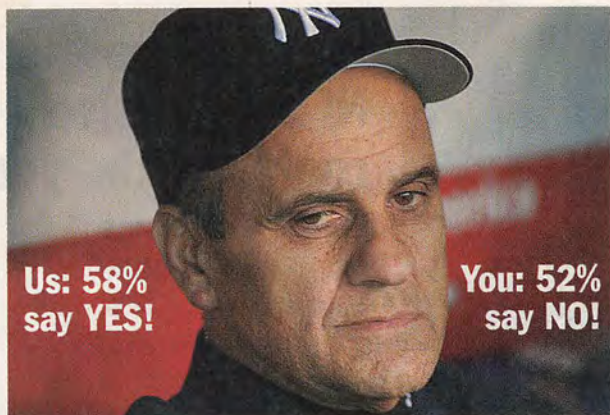
BILL WALTON'S PREDICTION Your scoring titles, MVPs of All-Star Games, the commercials and the *SportsCenter* highlights—those belong to the pretty boys on the perimeter. But the big guys, they're the ones playing in June. They're the ones who decide and define the fates and futures of Western civilization. We know a lot more about Durant's game—but this guy Oden, everything that's been asked of him, he's delivered. He hasn't been asked to do as much as Durant, but that will change in the NBA.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES (2)

From Joe to Jaws

Will Joe Torre be fired?



**Us: 58%
say YES!**

**You: 52%
say NO!**

JOHN DUNN FOR SN

Which new NFL coach will win the most games?

Us: 63% say the Chargers' Norv Turner

You: 67% say the Norvelous one, too

> Are we wrong for liking the Cowboys' Wade Phillips (25%) more than you do (16%)?

Will the N.L. finally get over the All-Star Game hump?

Us: 70% say NO!

You: 58% say NO!

DID YOU KNOW? The A.L. has won nine straight of these bad boys—not counting that one ri-stinkin'-dicolous tie.

Will Tubby Smith have a winning record in his first season at Minnesota?

Us: 63% say YES!

You: 59% say YES!



BOB LEVERONE / SN

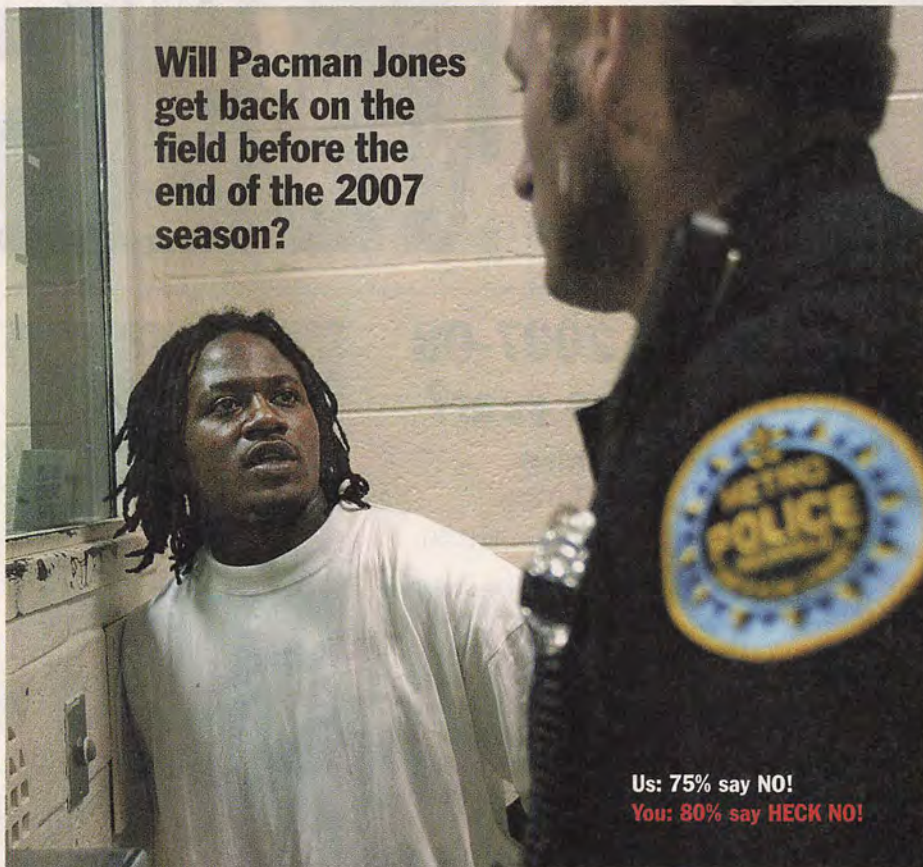
How far will Rick Majerus take Saint Louis in Season 1?

Us: 58% say NIT

You: 69% say NIT

> 18% of SN staffers see the Billikens in the Big Dance, but you (10%) aren't so confident.

Will Pacman Jones get back on the field before the end of the 2007 season?



Us: 75% say NO!

You: 80% say HECK NO!

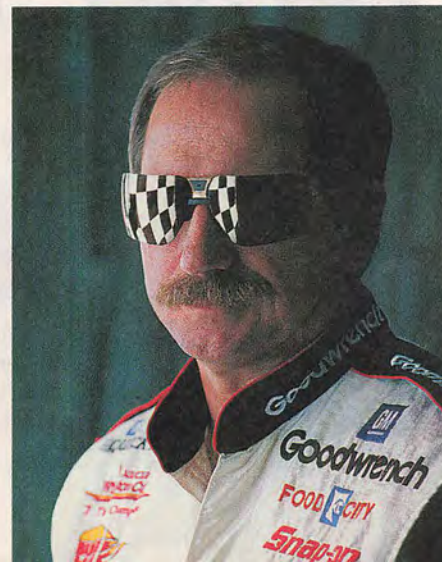
RICKY ROGERS / THE TENNESSEAN

Which sports movie will be the biggest hit at the box office?

Us: 40% say Dale

You: 42% say Blades of Glory

> Next for us: *Blades* (35%) then *Leatherheads* (18%); you: *Dale* (29%) then *Leatherheads* (16%).



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES



Will the people love or hate Tiki Barber on *Sunday Night Football*?

Us: 85% say love
You: 73% say love

Will the people love or hate Keith Olbermann on *Sunday Night Football*?

Us: 65% say hate
You: 59% say the 'H'-word, too

KEITH OLBERMANN'S PREDICTION I have no clue. It's always been one or the other, though. Generally speaking, it's been more love than hate. I think people will be more surprised because I'm not going to go out there as some sort of henchman, or as the Jack Tatum of sportscasters.



RICH ARDEN / ESPN

Will the people love or hate Ron Jaworski on *Monday Night Football*?

Us: 68% say love
You: 72% say smoochy smoochy

Text by Steve Greenberg / SN



The pitching-rich Padres can't hit, but neither can the rest of the N.L. West. That makes San Diego's spot at the top of the division look pretty comfy.

A gloom with a view

By Stan McNeal

smcneal@sportingnews.com



If Garciaparra and the rest of the N.L. West hitters don't get in the swing of things ...

When the N.L. West convenes for another week of intradivision games near the end of the month, those gray days along the Southern California coast known as June gloom should be nearing an end.

A dissipating marine layer, however, won't mean the end of the dark times for everyone. For N.L. West hitters, the forecast remains gloomy because of N.L. West pitchers. In the season's first 2½ months, dominant pitching performances in the West have become as regular as high tide.

Look how pitchers rolled when the Dodgers visited San Diego and the Giants played at Arizona last week. Until the final inning of the last game, the Padres had been held to seven runs in the series, but they still swept the Dodgers.

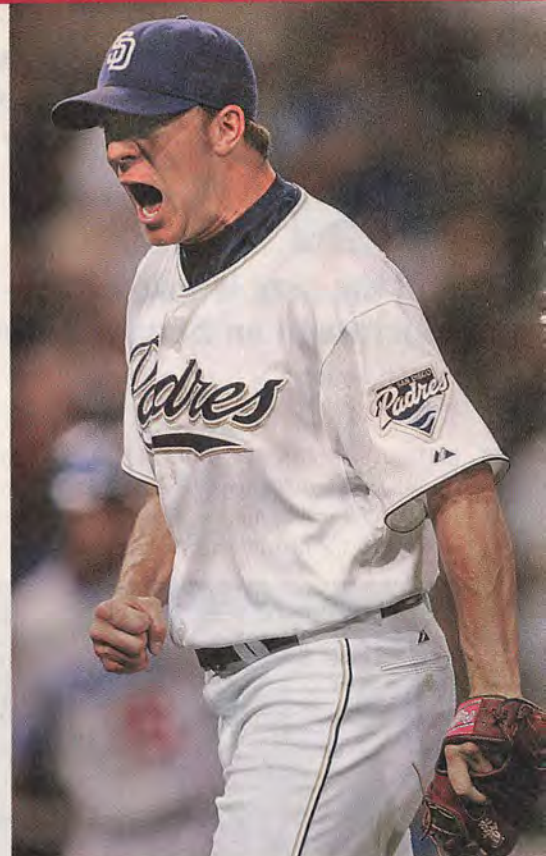
That's because the Dodgers scored seven runs total while hitting .215 in the three games. The Diamondbacks, meanwhile, totaled nine runs to the Giants' eight and took two of three in a series of 1-run games. Both series included a 1-0 game won by the home team.

This was no three-day anomaly. The preseason forecast in the West called for strong pitching, and "it certainly has played out to form," says Dodgers general manager Ned Colletti. The Padres lead the N.L. in ERA, and the Dodgers, Diamondbacks and Giants rank third, fourth and fifth. The N.L.'s top four in ERA—the Padres' Jake Peavy and Chris Young, the Dodgers' Brad Penny and the Giants' Matt Morris—all work in the West. Eight starters in the division began the week with at least six wins and 12 had posted ERAs under 4.00, the most in any division.

Two key variables have factored into this flood of pitching prowess: a limited market for available sluggers last offseason and California's pitcher-friendly ballparks. After Carlos Lee and Alfonso Soriano signed nine-figure deals elsewhere, the most notable position player to

join the N.L. West was Dodgers leadoff man Juan Pierre, whose .301 on-base percentage shows his transition has been anything but smooth. Playing in a division where only the Rockies' Coors Field ranks in the top half of ballparks in runs scored has something to do with Pierre's drop-off. No park has become more anti-hitter than San Diego's Petco, where the .221 average is 41 points below the major league average.

The result of all this lights-out pitching is a daily occurrence of close, low-scoring games that makes a tight race part of the seasonlong forecast. The Padres, Dodgers and D-backs, all at least eight games over .500, began the week separated by 1½ games. The Rockies and Giants were within a weeklong hot streak of .500 and further crowding the top of the standings.



... Peavy and the Padres pitchers will hold a position of power in the division.

And all the superb pitching places an even greater challenge on generating offense—any offense. Maybe Barry Bonds will get hot again for the Giants or some Padre will step up to help Adrian Gonzalez. Maybe Carlos Quentin or another of the young D-backs will find consistency. Or, surely, the Dodgers' Nomar Garciaparra and Rafael Furcal will combine for more than the one home run they've hit so far. Won't they?

Well, clubs cannot just sit around and hope. Colletti admits there's greater pressure to locate offense when one big bat could make a huge difference. He also realizes that's a little more challenging than predicting the weather in L.A. will be 70 with no rain. "We've been trying to find that since I took this job in November 2005," Colletti says. "Impact power hitters have become as difficult to come by as No. 1 starters."

They're out there, though. For the next six weeks, you'll hear the names—among them Adam Dunn, Mark Teixeira, Elijah Dukes, Mike Sweeney, Sammy Sosa and even Miguel Cabrera. But even if a club is fortunate enough to find additional power, the real question has become: Will an upgrade in power be enough to overcome a Padres pitching staff six-deep in starters with a bullpen that has a 2.15 ERA and is anchored by all-time saves leader Trevor Hoffman?

The outlook here says that's highly doubtful, no matter when the June gloom lifts. **SN**

INSIDE DISH

At least one scout is not surprised by the poor start of Cardinals RHP **Kip Wells** (2-10, 6.33 ERA), who has difficulty overcoming adversity. "It's makeup," the scout says. "I wouldn't touch him." ➤ A's DH **Jack Cust**'s 15 minutes are about up: After hitting eight homers in his first 13 games, he hasn't hit one since, a drought dating to May 19. That's what happens when you can't hit breaking balls. ➤ After a cold start to the season, offensive numbers still haven't caught up with 2006's pace. Runs, homers, batting average and on-base percentage all are down slightly compared with where they were at this time last year. The biggest difference is in slugging percentage: The major league average was .411 entering the week; it was .429 at the same point in '06. ➤ The Rangers' rotation has a ridiculously bad 6.92 ERA, and the offense has its own troubles. New manager **Ron Washington**'s attempt to make the Rangers more A's-like in their approach is not working. Compared with their first 59 games in 2006, the 2007 Rangers are walking less, scoring less and striking out more.



ROSS D. FRANKLIN / AP

Besides the fact he's not pitching with a cracked rib, the biggest difference in Giants RHP **Matt Morris** from last year to this year is his 12-to-6 curveball is biting like it did during his best years with the Cardinals.

ager **Earl Weaver** did not think Cubs manager **Lou Piniella** deserved a four-game suspension for his recent outburst. "I guess if they want to take all the fire out of baseball, they'll keep suspending them like that," Weaver says. Despite a recent rash of ejections that livened up the highlights shows, cooler heads have prevailed this season. There were 72 ejections through June 7, down from 80 at the same point last year and 76 in 2005.

Moving out West

With about six weeks until the July 31 nonwaiver trading deadline, N.L. West clubs have plenty of time to make a move.

Dodgers. Third base is their biggest hole, and they have enough prospects to pry Miguel Cabrera from the Marlins. But the Dodgers have been reluctant to trade away their future, and the Marlins will be asking for the moon.

Padres. This is the place where it is mandatory to mention Scott Linebrink. The Padres need a left fielder and have the pitching depth to deal.

Giants. They could dangle lefty Noah Lowry for the right stick. Mark Teixeira makes sense, but he makes sense for numerous other teams, too.

Diamondbacks. Arizona is more likely to wait for its own guys to heat up than to make a move, even if that means waiting until next year to be a true contender.

Rockies. They're likely to be sellers. Todd Helton, anyone? —S.M.



GREGORY SMITH / AP

Cabrera will be a popular—and expensive—trade target in the next six weeks.

BLOG ALERT

'If I had a vote, it would always be "no" on replays of any kind.'

You don't have to hit rewind to verify Stan McNeal's opinions at sportingnews.com.

speedreads

Dan Haren, take a bow. You have become the best pitcher in the game.

A good week for old guys: Schilling's near no-no, Rocket's winning debut, Pedro's encouraging bullpen session and even Percival's return. But don't forget, fellas: The older you are, the longer the hot summer becomes.

Welcome back, Joe Mauer. Now let's see if you can stick in the lineup awhile.

Fantasy Source

They're there. They really exist. So what's a commissioner to do?

Dealing with deadbeat owners

By Rob Hurtt

rhurtt@sportingnews.com

This is the time of year when no-see-ums become a problem. No, not those pesky little bugs. I'm talking about fantasy owners who have already bailed on their leagues.

You know that last-place owner exists because you saw him on draft day. Or at least a computer made picks for an account you assumed belonged to a real human being. But once things started going poorly during the season, this owner disappeared faster than a Hollywood marriage.

There are several telltale signs of a deadbeat owner. He's the guy who still has Jim Thome on the disabled list two weeks after he returned to the lineup. He's the owner who has held the top waiver spot since early May and allowed valuable free agents to slip past him. And the dead giveaway: This person's team is in last place and shows no signs of getting out.

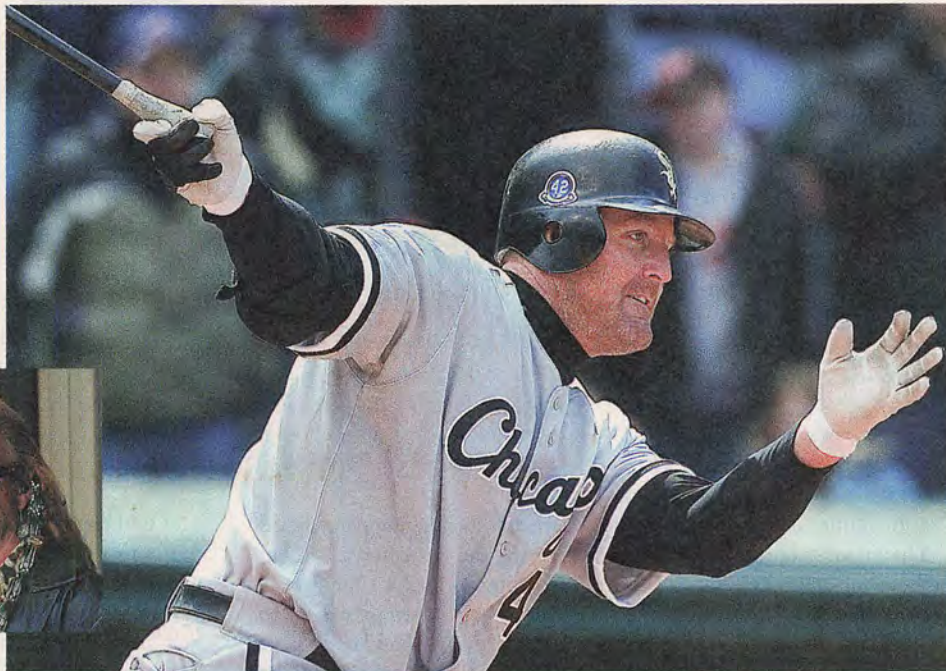
Inactive owners are scourges on their leagues. If you're playing in a 12-team league, Mr. Oblivious will make it seem more like an 11.5-team configuration.

A league commissioner can have a real problem if a deadbeat owner also happens to be the one who has yet to pay league dues. Unless his players pick up immediately, there's probably a better chance of Boston fans cheering Alex Rodriguez than collecting that money.

However, there's no need to call in Dog the Bounty Hunter—at least not right away. As commissioner, you first should make contact with the owner and remind him of his responsibilities. Be polite but firm. The owner knew what he was getting into at the start of the season. (He *did* know, right?) The conversation could be awkward, but it beats the alternative: telling the league champ the pot is short because you couldn't handle your job.



LUCY PEMONI / AP



JAY BROWNS / SN

Anybody who doesn't activate Thome deserves to have Dog the Bounty Hunter on his trail.

Fixing this problem for the long term should be easier. Considering the owner isn't paying much attention anyway, he probably won't notice when he isn't asked back next season.

It might be good to let the owner know you're considering such a drastic measure. Given a warning, he might even become more vigilant

about checking his team. Besides, maybe there's a personal reason the owner has gone MIA. People do have lives outside of fantasy baseball, and it could be that his last-place team is the least of his worries right now.

Once he gets that bowling average up, maybe then he can focus more on his fantasy interests.



JACK DEMPSEY / AP

Kaz Matsui and his teammates do score—but not like the Rockies of old.

Number that counts

23 The Rockies' ranking among major league teams in runs scored. In their previous 14 seasons, the Rockies never finished lower than 14th. The Coors Field humidors and a rebuilding roster are affecting an offense that isn't as potent as the ones led by Dante Bichette, Larry Walker and Andres Galaraga during the team's Blake Street Bombers days.

STOCK WATCH *Whose value is moving up—and down*



JAY DROWNS / SN

Rising

Michael Young, SS, Rangers. We figured a guy with four straight 200-hit seasons and a .318 career average in June wouldn't stay down for long. The buy-

low period for Young is going ... going ... gone.

Ryan Garko, 1B, Indians. Andy Marte's struggles opened up regular playing time for Garko. Because his defense hasn't been a liability, Garko has been able to showcase his immense hitting talent.

Jeff Francis, SP, Rockies. After posting a 6.52 ERA in April, Francis has righted himself and is looking more like the guy who won 13 games last season. He would be a good addition to the back of your rotation.

Falling

Bronson Arroyo, SP, Reds. What's worse than hearing Arroyo sing? Watching him pitch for your fantasy team. His second National League season is making his first look like a fluke.

Garrett Atkins, 3B, Rockies. We keep waiting for a sign that he will turn around his season. Instead, we find more evidence that he overachieved last year.

Bill Hall, OF, Brewers. His home run total is down, and he eventually will lose eligibility as a fantasy shortstop. That makes Hall a pedestrian outfielder whose drop in the lineup will only add to your pain.

—George Winkler



PAT SULLIVAN / AP

'As a fantasy owner, I'm more concerned about **Carlos Zambrano** losing velocity on his fastball than his demeanor in the dugout.'

George Winkler says Zambrano may have bigger issues than making nice with Cubs catcher Michael Barrett. Want to fight about it? Go to sportingnews.com.



JAY DROWNS / SN

TOP 5

Soon-to-be-healthy players you might have forgotten about

1 Josh Johnson, SP, Marlins. It's easy to forget that Johnson was a No. 2 starter before his arm started acting up.

2 Mike Piazza, DH/C, A's. You can squeeze 3½ months out of Piazza's bat (and shoulder). It's probably your last chance to use him at catcher.



JAY DROWNS / SN

3 Eddie Guardado, RP, Reds. It's not difficult to imagine the artist formerly known as Everyday Eddie in the closer role. David Weathers is running on fumes.

4 Scott Podsednik, OF, White Sox. The team has been careful not to rush him back from his groin injury. He'll be tearing up the basepaths in no time.

5 Pedro Martinez, SP, Mets. His recent progress has been encouraging. Ten starts from Pedro are better than 30 starts from many other pitchers. —Chris Bahr

FANTASY DISH

After initially struggling in his new role as the Marlins' No. 3 hitter, SS **Hanley Ramirez** is getting more comfortable as a run producer. Ramirez, who hit .343 as a leadoff man, has boosted his average in the No. 3 spot to .298 since moving there in mid-May. The change hasn't affected his aggressiveness on the bases; he had eight steals in his first 25 games after the move. ➤ **SP C.C. Sabathia** (6-7, 290) is heavier than some NFL linemen, but he is one of baseball's five best pitchers. Abdominal injuries plagued him the past two years, but he has been healthy this season. If you have a chance to trade for him, jump at it. ➤ St. Louis coach **Dave Duncan** gets a lot of credit for resurrecting pitchers. Milwaukee coach **Mike Maddux** should get similar



GENE J. PUSKAS / AP

praise. Before RHP **Derrick Turnbow's** mental meltdown in the second half of last season, Maddux had built him into an elite closer. Now Maddux has done a similar job with RHP **Francisco Cordero**, whose fantasy trade value is at a high-water mark.

—Roger Kuznia

A look back to the future

The first-round picks of 2006 have taken divergent paths since being drafted into baseball together *By Paul Day*

Only die-hard baseball fans are familiar with more than a few of the players who were taken in last week's baseball draft. But all fans are a year closer to seeing many of the top picks from 2006 in major league uniforms. In fact, three first-round picks have already made their big league debuts, and third-rounder Joe Smith has thrived as a reliever with the Mets.

Twelve months after the draft, a quick progress report on the 2006 first-round picks shows many are on the fast track to the majors while others have encountered roadblocks.



JOHN FROSCHAUER / AP

Three for the show


These first-round picks from last June have already accumulated major league service time:

Brandon Morrow, Mariners. He is viewed as a future starter but is spending this season as a dominant setup man for closer J.J. Putz.

Tim Lincecum, Giants. He is only 5-11, 160 pounds, but the big boys hit just .204 against him in his first seven starts.

Andrew Miller, Tigers. After making eight relief appearances for Detroit in 2006, he was called up for a spot start last month and threw six shutout innings against the Cardinals. Then after posting a 0.59 ERA in four starts at Class AA Erie, Miller was recalled again, this time to replace the injured Nate Robertson.


Pick/Team	Player	2007 level
1. Royals	RHP Luke Hochevar	Class AA
2. Rockies	RHP Greg Reynolds	Class AA
 Reynolds (4-1, 1.58 ERA) is mowing down hitters—literally. He served a three-game suspension in May for drilling a batter who twice called time during Reynolds' delivery.		
3. Devil Rays	3B Evan Longoria	Class AA
4. Pirates	RHP Brad Lincoln	Injured
 Lincoln's elbow was reconstructed in April. Just the Pirates' luck: Five of the last six pitchers they have drafted in the first round have needed arm surgery.		
5. Mariners	RHP Brandon Morrow	Major leagues
6. Tigers	LHP Andrew Miller	Major leagues
7. Dodgers	LHP Clayton Kershaw	Low Class A
8. Reds	OF Drew Stubbs	Low Class A
9. Orioles	SS/3B Billy Rowell	Low Class A
10. Giants	RHP Tim Lincecum	Major leagues
11. Diamondbacks	RHP Max Scherzer	High Class A
 Scherzer was almost part of the '07 class as well but signed just before the June 1 deadline. Before that, he was pitching with the independent league Fort Worth Cats.		
12. Rangers	LHP Kasey Kiker	Low Class A
13. Cubs	OF Tyler Colvin	High Class A
14. Blue Jays	OF Travis Snider	Low Class A
 Snider's power may not be there yet, but his .335 average shows he's getting the hang of things.		
15. Nationals	OF Christopher Marrero	Low Class A
16. Brewers	RHP Jeremy Jeffress	Low Class A
17. Padres	2B/3B Matt Antonelli	High Class A
18. Phillies	RHP Kyle Drabek	Low Class A
19. Marlins	RHP Brett Sinkbeil	High Class A
20. Twins	OF Chris Parmelee	Low Class A
21. Yankees	RHP Ian Kennedy	Class AA
22. Nationals	RHP Colton Willems	Rookie league
23. Astros	C Maxwell Sapp	Low Class A
24. Braves	OF Cody Johnson	Rookie league
25. Angels	C Hank Conger	Low Class A
26. Dodgers	RHP Avery Morris	Rookie league
27. Red Sox	OF Jason Place	Low Class A
28. Red Sox	RHP Daniel Bard	High Class A
29. White Sox	RHP Kyle McCulloch	High Class A
30. Cardinals	RHP Adam Ottavino	High Class A


 Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. The Royals' first No. 1 overall pick has been up and down, just like his 3-5 record and 4.75 ERA suggest.





Hochevar

JONATHAN FERREY / GETTY IMAGES

 Antonelli had six hits when Lake Elsinore pummeled Lancaster, 30-0, in May. Don't believe it? Look it up.

 Don't fret, Yankee fans, help is on the way ... eventually. Kennedy recently earned a promotion to Trenton after going 6-1 with a 1.29 ERA at high Class A.

 He has struck out 49 times and gotten just 21 hits, but give the kid a break—he's only 18.

 It has been a rough year for Bard, who has battled control problems and a triceps strain.

THE CLOSER Todd Jones

This isn't a case of skippers gone wild

So you think things have gotten a little crazy lately? Our skipper, Jim Leyland, got tossed. So did Terry Francona, Lou Piniella, Charlie Manuel and, no surprise, Bobby Cox. Before assuming all were caused simply by anger over a close call, think again. There are several reasons a manager gets tossed.

The one everybody thinks of is to fire up a team. In all sincerity, this is closer to urban legend than reality. Sure, if a team is stagnant during a stretch, I've seen a skipper get thrown. Managers go out, pick fights and, in some cases, literally ask to be run. They put on a show, and their team gets the point.

Most veterans see through this, but it can be good for a young team because guys learn this is the big leagues and every game matters.

Another reason a manager gets run is when he's trying to change the perception of his team. When a team is bad for a few years, it never seems to get calls. So a skipper wants everyone, umps included, to know his team is going to fight.

The Tigers went through a little of this last season. Our skipper made it a point early to argue close calls. This is good for morale because it makes us feel like the skipper is in there with us. Even when the call is correct, the message is the same: "We're not going to tolerate you assuming we're still bad anymore." Pretty soon, word spreads that this truly is a new year. It's unreal, but calls start going your way.

Another reason for a conflict is when a manager is protecting one of his players. The manager knows it's no big deal if he gets tossed, but if the team loses a star, it can be bad.

This isn't the latest dance craze; it's just an ump running another manager.

I've seen managers get ejected, then call in the player they were protecting and tell that guy he was wrong to argue in that situation. But the manager still backed his guy and the guy never forgets it.

A few years ago, Pirates manager Lloyd McClendon was arguing on behalf of Jason Kendall, who had hustled down the line only to be called out on a bang-bang play. McClendon got carried away, "stole" first base and was ejected and fined substantially.

The best part is Kendall sent a check to Major League Baseball on behalf of his manager. Ask Kendall about this story and he lights up talking about McClendon. Ask McClendon and he lights up talking about Kendall.

A win-win situation, even if the skipper watched the end of the game from the clubhouse.

E-mail Todd Jones, a reliever for the Tigers, at tjones@sportingnews.com.



A.L. EAST

MLB.com 

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

2B **Brian Roberts** leads the majors in stolen bases despite a tight hamstring. He is picking his spots on the bases. ... RHP **Scott Williamson** (triceps) has been used sparingly. He has a long injury history and isn't always healthy enough to take the ball. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** C **Matt Wieters**, a switch hitter, was considered the top college position player in the draft. He hits for average and is an excellent defensive catcher despite his 6-5 frame. Wieters could be a fast riser. —*Spencer Fordin*

BOSTON RED SOX

Speedy **Coco Crisp** has been getting great breaks on the ball and saving runs. He is more comfortable after gaining a year of experience playing center field. ... LHP **Hideki Okajima**'s changeup, which he grips like a split-finger pitch, has made him dominant against righthanders. He didn't use the pitch much in Japan.

TOP DRAFT PICK: LHP **Nick Hagadone** was the team's first pick at No. 55 overall. He throws a low-90s fastball, an effective slider and a changeup. Hagadone (6-5, 230) was a closer in college at Washington, but the Red Sox project him as a starter. —*Ian Browne*



NEW YORK YANKEES

This season has been a grind for RHP **Mike Mussina**, who can't find his trademark control. The Yankees have tried to increase Mussina's comfort level by making **Wil Nieves** his personal catcher, but Nieves' troubles at the plate hurt the team as a whole. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** N.C. State RHP **Andrew Brackman** battled minor elbow problems this spring, but he's a 6-10 power pitcher. If he continues to develop his off-speed pitches, he could get on the fast track. —*Bryan Hoch*

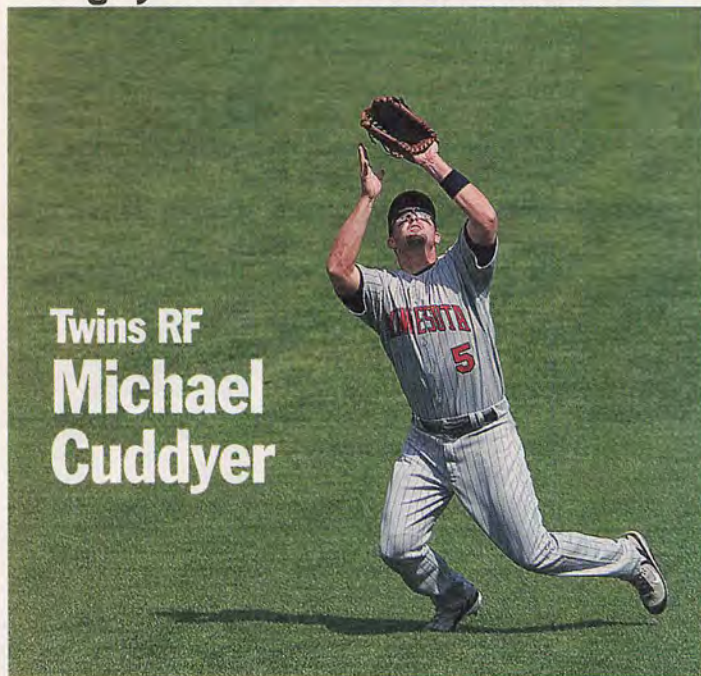
TAMPA BAY DEVIL RAYS

Casey Fossum's move from the rotation gives the bullpen a left-hander. He has been more willing to cut loose with his fastball recently; he had been hesitant to do so after shoulder surgery last September. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Vanderbilt LHP **David Price**, the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, is an athletic 6-5, 230-pounder with a great makeup. His fastball command is well above average. His slider can be an out pitch, but he also likes to use it to set up an inside fastball. Price could be in the major leagues as early as 2008. —*Bill Chastain*

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

With **Lyle Overbay** (hand) out until early to mid-July, **Matt Stairs** will get most of the playing time at first base. Stairs actually has been hitting better than Overbay (.286 to .256) and could add pop to the middle of the lineup. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** High school SS **Kevin Ahrens** has a strong arm but average range; he might project as a third baseman. He is a strong hitter who uses all fields and has good power potential. Ahrens began switch hitting as a sophomore and has a smooth stroke from both sides. —*Jordan Bastian*

Things you need to know about ...



Twins RF
Michael Cuddyer

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Michael Cuddyer is easy to overlook—he plays on a team with the A.L.'s reigning batting champion (Joe Mauer), Cy Young award winner (Johan Santana) and MVP (Justin Morneau). But Cuddyer could hold his own on any roster; he is on pace for his second consecutive 100-plus-RBI season.

He is comfortable with his status. "Those guys are great players and deserve the spotlight. I am confident in what I can do, and what this team can do. We have the same lineup as last season, so everyone understands their role. That's a good feeling."

He can play defense, too. A shortstop as an amateur, he played some third base for the Twins before becoming a fixture in right field last season. He leads A.L. outfielders with 13 assists this year.

You have to pay close attention to know he's deaf in his left ear, the result of a childhood virus. When filling out paperwork after being drafted, he checked "no" by the line asking if he had any hearing problems. "It wasn't a problem," he told reporters. "It isn't a problem."

He's a magic man. Seriously. He has performed for kids and has amazed teammates and coaches since his minor league days. "It's something I like to do. When I find a new trick I like, I'll work on it a couple of hours a day to get it down."

When he's not playing or performing, he's a couch potato. "I guess I'm probably not the model of this generation as far as getting out and being active. I pretty much sit on my couch and watch movies."

He can choose from a collection of flicks that's up to 700 and growing. "Every Tuesday I'm at Best Buy buying the new releases. If a movie gets good reviews, even if it's of a genre I'm not particularly interested in, I'll get it."

He has a long list of favorites. "Braveheart, Shawshank Redemption, The Natural, GoodFellas. I'm not afraid of chick flicks. I even like stupid humor movies. I like the Wayans brothers. I watch *White Chicks* every time it's on and get a laugh. Baseball movies, I'd go with *The Natural* over *Bull Durham* because I like the story."

He got married last offseason. "I don't watch movies as much."

—Stan McNeal

A.L. CENTRAL

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

RHP **Mike MacDougal** was sent down to Class AAA Charlotte to sort out mechanical issues and focus on locating his pitches better. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** LHP **Aaron Poreda** was considered one of the hardest throwers available in the draft and has outstanding sink on his pitches, which will play well at hitter-friendly U.S. Cellular Field. Though he's a late bloomer—he was originally a walk-on at the University of San Francisco—Poreda could reach the majors within two or three years.

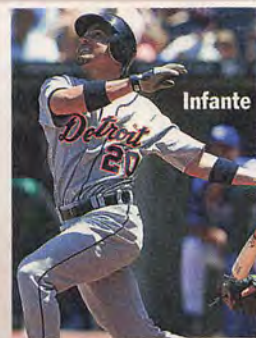
—Scott Merkin

CLEVELAND INDIANS

Franklin Gutierrez is spelling RF **Trot Nixon** against lefties. That's giving the team a chance to get a good look at Gutierrez, who's out of options after 2008. He's a fine defender who at times has trouble adjusting at the plate. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** The team used its only pick in the first three rounds on 1B **Beau Mills**, a lefthanded hitter with good power who needs to focus on pulling the ball less. A shoulder injury has affected Mills' throwing, so he won't play third base like he did in college. —Anthony Castrovina

DETROIT TIGERS

Omar Infante thrives as a utility infielder and also is athletic enough to replace **Curtis Granderson** in center field against some lefthanders. Infante no longer tries to pull everything and has a knack for picking up timely singles. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Scouts compare RHP **Rick Porcello**'s repertoire to RHP **Justin Verlander**'s. Porcello has been called the best high school pitcher since RHP **Josh Beckett**. Porcello complements his mid-90s fastball with a nasty curveball and a power slider. Signing him will be a challenge. —Jason Beck



Infante

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

OF **Joey Gathright**, promoted from Class AAA Omaha, adds speed to the lineup. The team wasn't able to steal or bunt much in the first two months, but Gathright bunted twice and stole two bases in his first two games. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Lefthanded-hitting SS **Mike Moustakas** can hit for average and power. He set California high school records for single-season and career homers. In the field, he shows good hands and a plus arm. Expect Moustakas to reach the majors in 2010. —Conor Nicholl

MINNESOTA TWINS

After a rough start, LF **Jason Kubel** is slowly looking more comfortable at the plate and in the field. The offense would get a nice boost if he could provide consistent power near the top of the lineup. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** OF **Ben Revere** is raw, but the team loves his speed and thinks he can become a catalyst at the top of the order. Scouting director **Mike Radcliff** says Revere, 19, has better speed than anyone currently in the organization. But don't look for Revere in the big leagues before 2011.

—Kelly Thesier



SP Miguel Batista, Mariners ➤ SP Tom Gorzelanny, Pirates ➤ RP Jason Isringhausen, Cardinals ➤ RP Matt Capps, Pirates **STUMBLERS** C Jason Varitek, Red Sox ➤

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

1B **Casey Kotchman** is showing better plate discipline and more power than expected. He is superb on defense—his soft hands save runs for pitchers and prevent throwing errors by infielders. ... RHPs **Dustin Moseley** and **Chris Bootcheck** have been valuable relievers; they are hard throwers who pound the strike zone. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** High school RHP **Jon Bachanov**—the 58th overall pick—is a power pitcher. With his long frame, good stuff and competitive streak, he's a starter in the mold of RHP **John Lackey**. Bachanov will need time to develop. —*Lyle Spencer*

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

RHP **Sanctiogo Casilla**, who made big league cameos in each of the past three seasons, is back with the A's—and this time he could stick. With RHPs **Huston Street** (elbow) and **Justin Duchscherer** (hip) out, Casilla gives the team a righthanded option in the ninth inning. He has a devastating slider. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** UC Riverside RHP **James Simmons** usually pitches in the high 80s, and some scouts say he has the best fastball command of anyone in the draft. Though Simmons' changeup has the potential to be a plus pitch, his curve and slider are below-average. —*Mychael Urban*

SEATTLE MARINERS

SS **Yuniesky Betancourt** is quietly having a season worthy of All-Star consideration. He is hitting .307 and will be a Gold Glove-caliber defender once he improves his throwing accuracy. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** The franchise that loves big, hard-throwing pitchers found another in high school RHP **Phillipe Aumont** (6-7, 225), who has a mid-90s fastball, sharp curve and an improving slider. He has a lot of experience with the Canadian junior national team, so he could move through the system quickly. —*Jim Street*



DENIS POROY / AP

TEXAS RANGERS

Rangers starters have struggled with **Gerald Laird** behind the plate, but he'll remain the starter even though the team acquired C **Adam Melhuse**. Look for Melhuse to catch once or twice a week after playing sparingly behind workhorse **Jason Kendall** in Oakland. Melhuse's bat has a little pop. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** RHP **Blake Beavan** went to high school about 15 minutes from Rangers Ballpark. He throws 96-98 mph with a good slider, but his mechanics and delivery may need work. Beavan is an intense competitor who needs to keep his emotions in check on the mound. —*T.R. Sullivan*



June 21, 1989 Sammy takes Roger over and out

He didn't look like the Sammy Sosa we've come to know and ... well, you fill in the blank. Shoot, at 6-0 and 165 pounds (as listed in the Rangers' 1989 media guide), he was a different Sammy. Yet he could hit, almost from the start.

Playing in his sixth major league game against the Red Sox at Fenway Park, the 20-year-old Sosa was matched against Roger Clemens, already a two-time Cy Young award winner. Clemens began the game by striking out Sosa (yes, he was batting leadoff); one newspaper account reported that Clemens "blew him away."

But with one out in the fifth, Sosa smashed a Clemens pitch into the netting above the Green Monster. The bulk of the 597 homers that have followed came during Sosa's mostly glorious 13-year run with the Cubs. But perhaps it's fitting that he's destined to join the elite 600-homer club while wearing the same uniform as when he hit No. 1.

Clemens, you may have noticed, also has been in the news of late. —*Joe Hoppel*

About six weeks after this game, Scott Fletcher was included in the trade that sent Sosa to the White Sox.

Wade Boggs won the last of his five batting titles (and fourth consecutive) in 1988. In '89, he finished at "only" .330.

Texas	AB	R	H	RBI
Sosa, CF-RF	6	2	2	1
Fletcher, SS	5	2	1	0
Palmeiro, 1B	4	0	3	2
Sierra, RF	5	2	2	0
Espy, CF	0	0	0	0
Franco, 2B	5	1	3	1
Kunkel, 2B	0	0	0	0
Petralli, DH	5	1	5	2
Leach, LF	3	0	0	0
Buechele, 3B	5	1	1	2
Kreuter, C	5	1	2	1
Totals	43	10	19	9

Yep, that Julio Franco. He was 30 and in his eighth season in '89.

Rafael Palmeiro and Sosa had memorable days on the field but a not so dazzling day at a congressional hearing in 2005.

This was Gary Mielke's only victory in a 79-game major league career.

Kenny Rogers was a rookie reliever in 1989. Converted into a starter in '93, he now is a Tiger who has 207 victories.

Boston	AB	R	H	RBI
Reed, 2B	3	1	1	0
Heep, LF-RF	5	1	3	0
Boggs, 3B	3	0	1	1
Greenwell, DH	4	1	2	0
Evans, RF	3	0	1	2
Williams, LF	1	0	0	0
Esasky, 1B	4	0	0	0
Cerone, C	3	0	0	0
Kutcher, CF	4	0	1	0
Rivera, SS	4	0	0	0
Totals	34	3	9	3

Boston and "Williams, LF" make you think of Ted. Uh, no. Try Dana, who finished 2,653 hits behind the Splendid Splinter with one hit in five career at-bats.

Texas	000	130	600	-10	19	0
Boston	300	000	000	-3	9	1

E: Cerone. DP: Texas 1, Boston 2. 2B: Sierra. 2, Petralli, Palmeiro, Kreuter, Reed, Greenwell, Evans. HR: Sosa. SH: Leach. SF: Boggs. SB: Greenwell. LOB: Texas 10, Boston 9.

Texas	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Witt	4	7	3	3	2	5
Hall	2/3	0	0	0	0	0
Mielke W, 1-0	2 1/3	0	0	0	0	2
Rogers	1	1	0	0	0	2
Guante	1	1	0	0	2	0

Boston	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Clemens L, 8-5	5 2/3	12	4	4	3	4
Stanley	2/3	4	4	3	0	1
Lamp	2 2/3	3	2	1	0	2

Umpires: Rich Garcia, Derryl Cousins, Tim McClelland, Joe Brinkman.
Time: 3:25. Attendance: 34,338.

■ Seventeen years after Cecil Fielder swatted 51 homers for the Tigers, Detroit fans have a chance to watch next-generation slugger **Prince Fielder**. The similarities between the two are striking, with one exception: Prince plays with a chip on his shoulder, while Cecil played with chip crumbs on his chest.



JAY DROWNS / SN

■ The Indians were the victims in the Braves' only World Series title during their incredible playoff run from 1991-2005. But Braves manager **Bobby Cox** is in a foul mood over Bud Selig's recent announcement that he won't follow Cox across the country as he chases the all-time record for ejections.



GREGORY SMITH / AP

■ Sammy Sosa began his career as a Ranger, achieved stardom as a Cub and is once again a Ranger. Also during that 18-year span he learned, forgot and relearned the English language.

Dream week

June 14-20

THURSDAY, JUNE 14

Brewers at Tigers

FRIDAY, JUNE 15

Braves at Indians

SATURDAY, JUNE 16

Cardinals at A's

SUNDAY, JUNE 17

Giants at Red Sox

MONDAY, JUNE 18

Twins at Mets

TUESDAY, JUNE 19

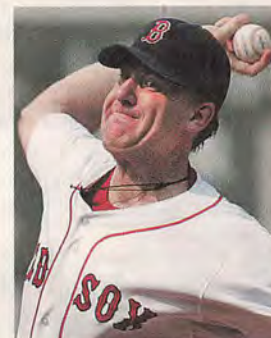
Cubs at Rangers

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20

Yankees at Rockies

■ Don't look for many stolen bases from these station-to-station teams. Speaking of steals, when are the A's going to get prosecuted for pilfering Dan Haren from the Cards for Mark Mulder?

■ Barry Bonds recently took exception to **Curt Schilling's** remarks that the slugger cheated the game of baseball. Schilling refuses to discuss his accusations of dishonesty before the game; instead, he paints more blood on his sock.



ELISE AMENDOLA / AP

■ Mets prospect and aspiring rapper Lastings Milledge is stuck at Class AAA, meaning the lyrical genius will miss the golden songwriting opportunity to rhyme the names Morneau, Castillo, Punto, Cirillo and Machado.

■ Alex Rodriguez loves playing here because his screams of, "We want a batter, not a broken ladder!" travel farther in Denver's thin air. —Chris Bahr

N.L. EAST

ATLANTA BRAVES

Because he no longer is attempting to be a power hitter, OF **Willie Harris** has avoided the slumps that plagued him with the Red Sox and White Sox. With the more controlled swing he has adopted, his speed is better utilized. ... 3B **Yunel Escobar** seems ready to be an everyday player, but there's no long-term position for him with the Braves. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Jason Heyward (6-4, 220), who looks like a linebacker, has the potential to develop into a power-hitting outfielder. He's just 17, so the earliest he figures to make the big leagues is 2011. —Mark Bowman

FLORIDA MARLINS

Stolen base production has dropped since SS **Hanley Ramirez** moved from leading off to batting third. CFs **Alfredo Amézaga** and **Reggie Abercrombie**, who have been hitting leadoff, are fast but don't reach base as regularly as Ramirez. With 3B **Miguel Cabrera** batting cleanup, Ramirez isn't chancing steals when he gets on, though the team wants him to be aggressive. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Team officials say high school 3B **Matt Dominguez's** hands and feet remind them of the Nationals' **Ryan Zimmerman's**. Dominguez lacks speed but can hit for average and power. —Joe Frisaro

NEW YORK METS

A string of injuries to outfielders prompted the team to recall **Ricky Ledee** from Class AAA, where he was hitting .287 with eight home runs. The team sent down **David Newhan**, who is more of an infielder and hasn't provided much offensive production this season. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Oregon State RHP **Eddie Kunz**, who was taken in the second round, throws a heavy fastball in the 93- to 94-mph range, a late-breaking slider and a changeup that he uses against lefthanders. Mets assistant G.M. **John Ricco** says Kunz shouldn't need a lot of minor league seasoning. —Marty Noble



DUANE BURLESON / AP

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

RHP **Freddy Garcia** (shoulder) went on the D.L., but the team won't move RHP **Ryan Madson** from the bullpen to the rotation. ... The team signed RHP **Jose Mesa**, who was released by the Tigers. He thinks he'll be more effective in the N.L., where he will get more consistent work. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** LHP **Joe Savery** throws a four-seam fastball at 93-95 mph. He works it in and out against righthanded hitters and pounds the inner half against lefties. After returning from shoulder surgery while at Rice, Savery threw fewer breaking balls. Scouts love his change. —Ken Mandel

WASHINGTON NATIONALS

Nook Logan will play against lefthanders in a center field platoon with **Ryan Langerhans**. The hope was Logan, a switch hitter, would develop into an everyday player in 2007, but he hasn't found his stroke from the left because of a shoulder injury. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** LHP **Ross Detwiler** is a power pitcher who mixes in a curve and a change and has good command on both sides of the plate. The team is impressed by Detwiler's ability to handle the elements. In an April game for Missouri State, he allowed one run in seven innings despite windy, 35-degree conditions. —Bill Ladson



JOHN CORDAS FOR SN

3UP 3DOWN

1. The Yankees. When the big-money Yankees are losing, they get mocked for not being resourceful. So you have to give them a nod when they are winning with Miguel Cairo logging significant time at first base.

2. Victor Martinez's power. He's more of a run producer than a home run hitter, though it was noteworthy when he hit only 16 homers in 572 at-bats in 2006. The Indians' catcher is elevating the ball and driving it to

all fields this season, and he had 12 homers in his first 210 at-bats.

3. Jorge Sosa. Catcher Paul Lo Duca said Sosa turned in the Mets' best starting performance of the season last Friday, when he shut out the Tigers for eight innings. Sosa, who had a 3-11 record with the Braves and Cardinals last season, is 6-1 with a 2.64 ERA. Opponents are hitting .187 against him.

1. The rest of the Mets. Sosa's victory was the only one they got over a seven-game span, and it put their "Best in the N.L." status in question. The Tigers scored 23 runs in the final two games of their series. The injuries are piling up, and Carlos Delgado is hitting .227.

2. J.D. Drew. He's rebounding from an awful May, but he also is getting dinged up, as everyone predicted. The Red Sox and their fans are slowly beginning to comprehend what Drew is: an enigma.

3. Baseball in Florida. Who says this is a football state? The Sunshine showdown between the Devil Rays and Marlins in Miami drew 45,234 fans. Oh, wait. That was for the entire three-game series.

—Kyle Veltrop



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

N.L. CENTRAL

MLB.com

CHICAGO CUBS

Rookie **Felix Pie** is here to stay. He's not only going to get the most playing time in center field but also in the coveted No. 2 spot—which is fastball heaven battling ahead of 1B **Derrek Lee**. Although Pie is vulnerable against lefthanders and may sit out when they pitch, his glove, speed and energy are too good to waste in the minors. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** The Cubs went for offense when they selected 3B **Josh Vitters**. Vitters missed some playing time in his last high school season because of pneumonia but hit .390 with nine homers and 29 RBIs. He is considered closest to the majors among all prep players in this year's draft. —Carrie Muskat



Vargas

JAY DROWNS / SN

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

Manager **Ned Yost** has urged RHP **Claudio Vargas** to vary his moves to the plate to compensate for a slow delivery. Because Vargas holds the ball so long between pitches, runners can't easily time their jumps. ... RF **Corey Hart** has good speed for a 6-6 slugger. He leads the team with 10 steals—he has been caught only once—and has legged out some infield hits. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** **Matt LaPorta** has an advanced bat for a college player and great power potential. He will move through the system quickly—if he can handle the move from first base to left field. LaPorta could make his major league debut as early as 2009. —Adam McCalvy

CINCINNATI REDS

RHP **Homer Bailey**, the team's top prospect, was called up after going 6-1 with a 2.31 ERA at Class AAA. He then beat the Indians in his first big league start. Bailey, 21, has worked to refine his curve and change so he doesn't have to rely so heavily on his 95- to 98-mph fastball. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** C **Devin Mesoraco** is athletic and has decent speed for his position. He's a righthanded hitter with power to left. Mesoraco had elbow surgery in 2005 but is considered to have a strong arm. He's expected to sign with the club, but he won't turn 19 until next week and needs time to develop. —Mark Sheldon

PITTSBURGH PIRATES

The recall of **Rajai Davis** likely signals a loss of playing time for CF **Chris Duffy**. The speedy Davis could provide the leadoff spark the team has been lacking. ... RHP **Shawn Chacon** appears to have solidified his position as the fifth starter, having built up the stamina to consistently reach the 100-pitch mark. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** LHP **David Moskos** has two knockout pitches, a wicked slider and a mid-90s fastball, and that makes him a potential closer. But if he is able to develop an effective changeup, he may become a starter. He could be with the Pirates in three years. —Jennifer Langosch

HOUSTON ASTROS

Chris Burke is back in the big leagues despite hitting just .250 during his demotion to Class AAA Round Rock. He'll fill his familiar supersub role in a platoon with **Luke Scott** in right field, and he'll get sporadic starts at shortstop and second base, positions the team needs more offense from. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** The Astros, who didn't pick until the third round, took **Derek Dietrich**, a lefthanded-hitting prep shortstop with good power. He could eventually wind up at third because of his arm strength. He has a good swing and strong knowledge of the strike zone. —Alyson Footer

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

2B **Adam Kennedy**'s playing time continues to dwindle. He isn't hitting for average and hasn't driven the ball all season. ... **Juan Encarnacion** finally appears to be healthy. He hit four home runs in an eight-game span—more than all the team's right fielders had hit before that stretch. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** High school SS **Pete Kozma** rates as solid, though he has no single skill that dazzles observers. The Cardinals say he will hit for average and could develop power. They expect to keep him at shortstop, where he would be relatively unblocked in the organization. —Matthew Leach

Ho-hum, 500 saves

Like so many before it, the 500th save of Trevor Hoffman's career came late, late at night, with much of the sports world already tucked into bed.

Unlike so many before it, he recorded that last out of the ninth inning with a fastball—a called Strike 3 to the Dodgers' Russell Martin—and not a changeup, his signature pitch.

After earning two saves with the expansion Marlins in 1993, Hoffman has picked up the rest while pitching for the Padres, who aren't exactly the Yankees in terms of mass appeal. And a changeup? That's hardly the pitch favored by fire-breathing closers.

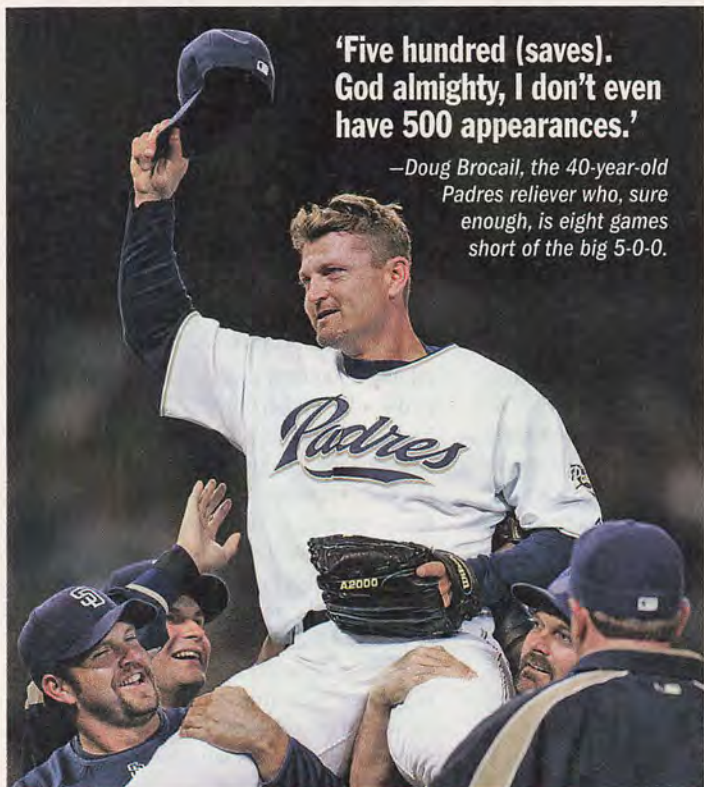
Maybe those are among the reasons No. 500 didn't create much of a buzz last week. Sure, newspapers mentioned the note and highlights showed David Wells and another teammate hoisting Hoffman onto their shoulders. But let's face it, Wells doing anything would have been a bigger story to some.

That's at least in part because Hoffman wasn't chasing anyone; he already had the saves record, set last year with No. 479. Also, the save did not become an official statistic until 1969 and isn't firmly stitched in the game's fabric.

But it also is because Hoffman, though cherished in Southern California, is still something of a national unknown. He quietly—save for his "Hells Bells" entrance music—goes about picking up save after save after save ...

The 2007 season will be remembered in large part as the year of the milestone. Barry and 756. Biggio and 3,000. Glavine and 300. Sammy and Junior and 600. Five more eyeing 500. Those all are still to come. But don't forget that, first, there was Trevor Hoffman, recording the last out for the 500th time.

Hoffman's used to finishing up; this time, he got things started. —K.V.



N.L. WEST

MLB.com

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

Getting first-pitch strikes is particularly important for RHP **Livan Hernandez** because he needs hitters to expand their zones in order to have success. Hernandez, who has cut down on his walks, lives on the corners. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** The D-backs saw 10 of RHP **Jarrod Parker**'s starts in high school and came away impressed with his control and his fastball, which can reach 98 mph. Parker also throws a curve, slider and changeup, and he has good mechanics. —Steve Gilbert

COLORADO ROCKIES

RHP **Taylor Buchholz** was efficient enough in his trial as a replacement starter for injured RHPs **Rodrigo Lopez** and **Josh Fogg** that the Rockies moved him into a late-game role in place of RHP **Ramon Ramirez**, who was sent down to Class AAA to regain the command on his fastball and slider. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** RHP **Casey Weathers** has a fastball that has been clocked at 98 mph and a slider he throws as hard as 91 mph. The team seldom moves pitchers through the system quickly, but Weathers, a former Vanderbilt closer, could be an exception. —Thomas Harding



LOS ANGELES DODGERS

CF **Juan Pierre**'s struggles prompted management to recall **Matt Kemp** even though Pierre is in the first year of a five-year deal. The problem is simple: Pierre can't take advantage of his speed if he hits the ball in the air. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** Drafting **Chris Withrow** follows the team's trend of focusing on high school righthanders with large frames and solid character. Withrow is tall (6-3) with good mechanics and a fluid arm action. He probably is three-plus years away from the bigs. —Ken Gurnick

SAN DIEGO PADRES

C **Josh Bard**'s hot streak has coincided with a simplified approach. He is picking out only a couple of things to focus on each at-bat. ... The pitchers, particularly RHP **Chris Young**, have been more mindful of throwing to first base after opponents were running at will. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** LHP **Nick Schmidt** keeps his 88- to 92-mph fastball down, and he has a plus changeup—a pitch that is a favorite in the organization. Schmidt is considered a polished product and should move up quickly. —Corey Brock

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

Manager **Bruce Bochy** and pitching coach **Dave Righetti** must help preserve the stamina of 22-year-old RHPs **Matt Cain** and **Tim Lincecum** for the second half of the season. Cain, for example, has thrown at least 112 pitches in his past five starts. **TOP DRAFT PICK:** LHP **Madison Bumgarner** (6-4, 215) has a fastball in the mid-90s, and the team believes the prep standout could throw even harder once he fully matures. His curve and change aren't yet developed, but both project as adequate major league pitches. —Chris Haft

FS

UNFAVORABLE SCHEDULES **HITTERS** Devil Rays > Orioles > Reds > Twins **PITCHERS** Braves > Cubs > Giants > Nationals

That Camry may look good in your driveway, but it's sucking wind on the racetrack.

How can Toyota get better? Don't ask Dodge

By Mike Hembree

Is Toyota going to be like Dodge?

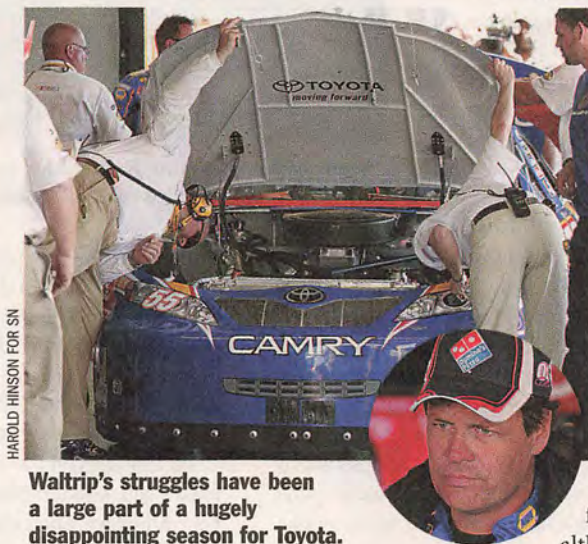
DaimlerChrysler made its heavily publicized return to the NASCAR Cup series in 2001. The theme was "It's Time," as in it's time for DaimlerChrysler to again have a major presence in the sport that Dodges, Plymouths and Chryslers once ruled.

That was the idea. The reality has been something less than sensational.

Despite hooking up with some serious shakers and movers—people like Ray Evernham, Chip Ganassi and Roger Penske—in the team ownership field and despite the presence of drivers like Kasey Kahne, Bill Elliott, Ryan Newman, Kurt Busch, Rusty Wallace and Bobby Labonte, Dodge has underachieved. There have been no championships, and wins have not been recorded as frequently as those in the Dodge camp had hoped.

This season, through 13 races, there have been no Dodge wins, and no Dodge drivers are in the top 12 in points.

Although a learning curve of some degree was expected when Dodge made the consider-



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

ERIK PEREL FOR SN

Waltrip's struggles have been a large part of a hugely disappointing season for Toyota.

able investment of time, resources and dollars to rejoin the fray at the top level of stock car racing, most observers would have predicted a better return on that effort by this point.

Toyota's struggle in its first season in Cup has been similarly frustrating. The embarrassing journey of Michael Waltrip has been the most

difficult. He was the object of national shame before the season opener at Daytona because of a cheating scandal that rocked the sport, then plunged into a long purgatory, failing to qualify for race after race after race. For months, he carried a singular scar: Because of Daytona penalties, his Nextel Cup points total was actually in negative numbers—the kind of calculations done more often in eighth-grade math class than in NASCAR standings.

The Toyotas have had a few splashes of positive reinforcement, but they needed 12 races to score their first top five finish, a fifth place by Brian Vickers in the Coca-Cola 600.

What's next? Look for improvement in the Toyota camp now that a reworked engine has been introduced and some of the Camry's bugs have been worked out. It's unlikely, though, that a quantum jump will occur. A win this year? Maybe.

Although Toyota did not sign a deal with one of the sport's leading teams to start its first season, there now are indications that it is casting about for bigger prey. That may be the best route to putting the manufacturer in a solid position quicker, although there still would be a period of adjustment.

As NASCAR moves into the heart of its season, both Toyota and Dodge—winless and wandering—need a big boost. **SN**

Mike Hembree is an associate editor for NASCAR Scene. Read more from Hembree at scenedaily.com.

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INSIDE DISH

Ford's recent performances suggest it needs a boost in the power department. Qualifying well at Pocono requires a ton of horsepower

because of the track's long straightaways, and considering **David Gilliland** was the top qualifier at 16th, Ford obviously is missing something. **Matt Kenseth** has the manufacturer's lone win of the season, at California in the second race. Horsepower will be important in this weekend's race at Michigan, a wide-open 2-mile track.

> The line between success and failure can be thin.

Scott Riggs' first lap in qualifying was not good enough to make the Pocono race. His second, which was 0.35 seconds faster, got him in the show. He finished the rain-shortened event in 18th place. His No. 10 Dodge is 36th in owners points, 20 behind **Johnny Sauter's** No. 70 Chevy. The top 35 in owners points are guaranteed a spot in every race. > **Kurt Busch** was fined \$100,000 and docked 100 drivers points for nearly running over one of **Tony Stewart's** pit guys. A suspension would not have been overboard, but critics who called the penalties meager need some perspective. Add 100 points to Busch's total and he climbs from 17th to 10th. That's a kick in the gut, not a slap on the wrist. Make no mistake, he deserved to get kicked in the gut. Of course, it's fair to wonder what Busch's punishment would have been if he didn't have a massive sponsor like



CAROLYN KASTER / AP

A suspension might not have been a bad idea, but NASCAR did not let Busch off easy when it docked him 100 points.

Miller Lite. > Only in NASCAR: Before **Chad McCumbee** made his Nextel Cup debut Sunday at Pocono, he was interviewed on TNT—by his car owner, **Kyle Petty**. McCumbee, who was born more than five years after Petty started his Cup career, finished 25th a day after winning the ARCA race there. Petty worked the TNT booth, and, just as he did in Busch Series races last season, provided insightful and entertaining commentary. > **Danica Patrick** finished third in the IRL race at Texas last weekend and was in contention to win in the final laps. It makes you wonder: How many Nextel Cup owners would have called her immediately had she won?

Pit box

Fantasy experts Roger Kuznia and Vinnie Iyer pick Nextel Cup race winners.

Who will win at Michigan?

Roger: Vinnie laughed when I told him I was picking Carl Edwards, considering Edwards hasn't won since 2005. Oh, little does Vinnie know. The No. 99 team has found the consistency needed to win on an intermediate track. Edwards led laps in both Michigan races last year, and he is running far better than Biffle is this season. I'll eat into Vinnie's points lead even more with my "W."

Vinnie: It has been a disappointing season for Greg Biffle, and really, anyone who doesn't race for Hendrick Motorsports. But Biffle's best Cup track is Michigan, and he'll deliver his third victory in nine career starts there to get back into Chase contention. You're right, Roger—Roush Fenway Fords are well-suited for Brooklyn, but Biffle will end his win drought in the No. 16 before his No. 99 teammate does.

- **Sleeper:** Reed Sorenson.
- **Not so fast:** Jamie McMurray.

- **Sleeper:** Elliott Sadler.
- **Not so fast:** Kyle Busch.

Nextel Cup points (based on how the experts' choices finished in points races): Vinnie, 1,973; Roger, 1,890.

SPEED reads

Count me among those who do not see signs of a turnaround at DEI. Martin Truex's win at Dover was impressive, but I'll wait until a DEI car is strong for, oh, say, half a season before getting excited.

This speed read has been postponed due to rain.

My father's brother's nephew's cousin's former roommate works at DEI and said Dale Jr. will either sign with Hendrick, Gibbs, RCR, Ginn or some other team.

There appears to be a chance NASCAR will ditch the early off week in the Nextel Cup Series. Great idea. Do it. —Matt Crossman

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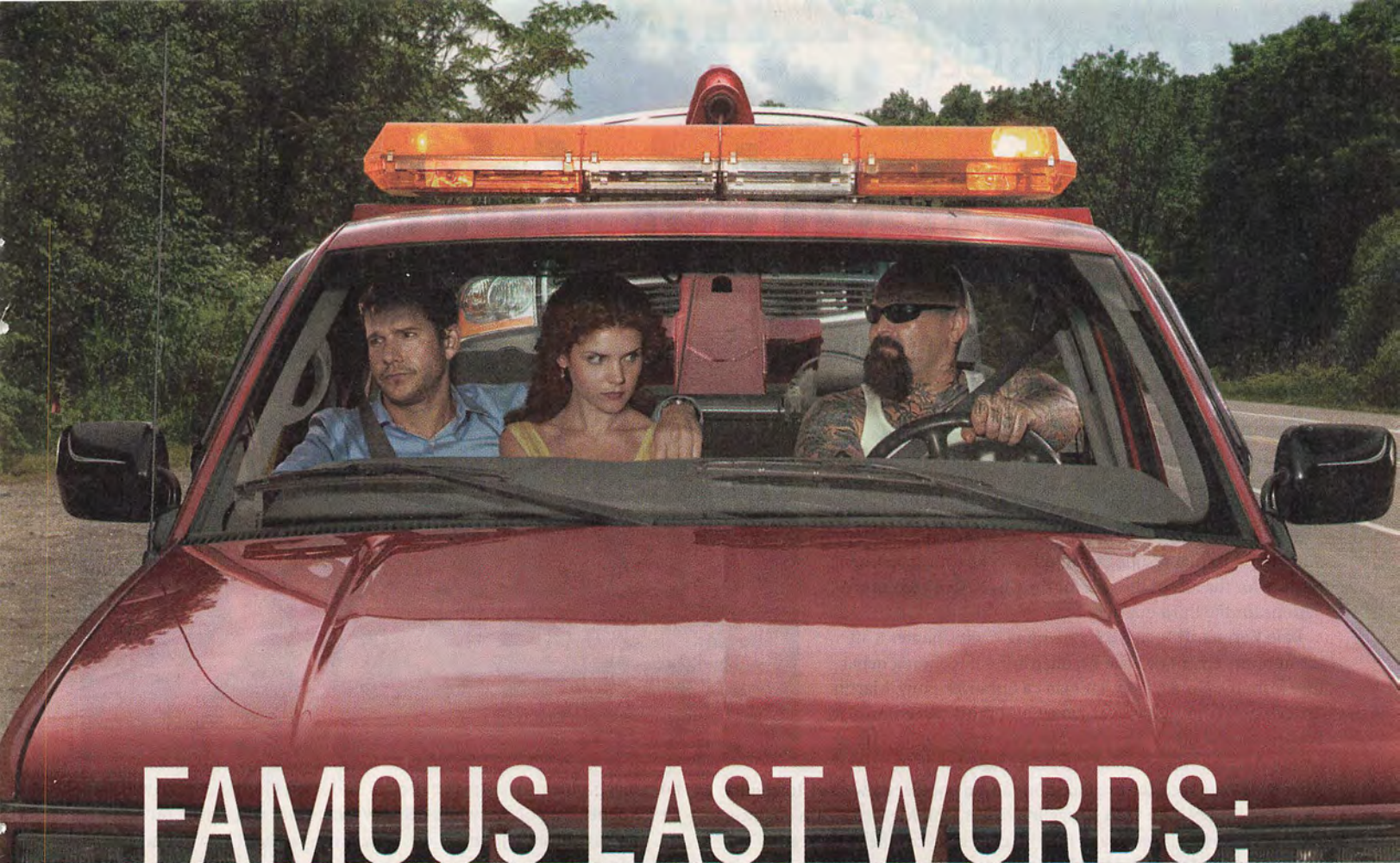


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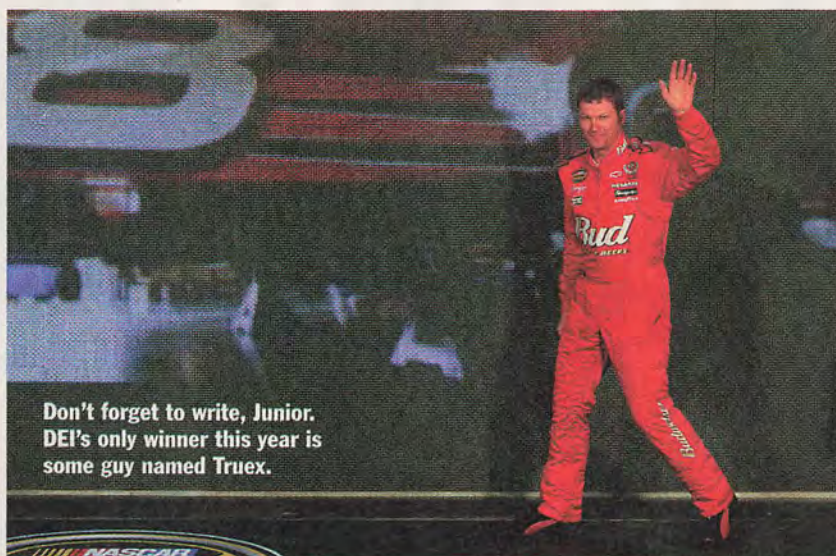
Third quarter forecast

Why you should buy DEI and sell RCR—and other insider tips for your stock car portfolio *By Reid Spencer*

We're just past the halfway mark in NASCAR's regular season—the 26 races that will determine the 12 participants in the Chase for the Nextel Cup—so it's time for a quarterly examination of our holdings. The second quarter brought dramatic developments that resulted in adjustments to our investment posture for the rest of the race for the Chase. Our recommendations for the third quarter:

Dale Earnhardt Inc.: BUY. Emerging from Chapter 8 after the announcement of Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s impending departure from the No. 8 Chevy, DEI isn't a one-trick pony. Martin Truex's breakthrough win at Dover and third-place finish at Pocono moved the driver of the No. 1 Chevrolet up to 11th in points. And the DEI brass isn't afraid to make tough decisions. After the Dover race, the organization moved popular crew chief Tony Eury Sr. out of his position with struggling driver Paul Menard. Team engineer Dave Charpentier is serving as interim crew chief for the No. 15 car.

Hendrick Motorsports: HOLD. We're not ready to dump our holdings in Nextel Cup's dominant conglomerate, but a change in fortune brought HMS back to earth. An early wreck in the Coca-Cola 600 ended the phe-



Don't forget to write, Junior. DEI's only winner this year is some guy named Truex.

ERIK PEREL FOR SN

nomenal problem-free streak of points leader Jeff Gordon, who could miss a race depending on his wife's delivery date. Uncharacteristic mistakes in the pits hurt Jimmie Johnson on consecutive weeks at Lowe's and Dover, and Kyle Busch has struggled of late to keep the No. 5 Chevy between the walls. But Hendrick got a boost from an unexpected source: Casey Mears scored his first Cup victory in the Coca-Cola 600. And Gordon picked up where he left off with his win Sunday at Pocono.

Mark Martin: BUY. Though not an explosive-growth stock, Martin is a solid blue-chip investment. If he qualifies for the Chase on a limited schedule, it will go on record as one of the most impressive accomplishments in the sport's history.

Kasey Kahne: BUY. Once in danger of falling out of the top 35 in points, Kahne has climbed to 28th and is on the rise. Owner Ray Evernham admits his teams chose the wrong direction aerodynamically with the new Dodge nose and are correcting the problem. A pending deal between Evernham and Montreal Canadiens owner George Gillett will bring an infusion of resources that will help all the Evernham teams.

Richard Childress Racing: SELL. It might be bad karma to sue NASCAR, even if it's your sponsor that litigates. RCR won the battle when AT&T Mobility got a preliminary injunction that allowed the placement of the AT&T logos on Jeff Burton's car, but the euphoria over the court victory hasn't translated to performance on the track. RCR has all three of its drivers in the top nine through 14 races, but Burton and Kevin Harvick have faltered of late. Overall, Clint Bowyer has been RCR's most consistent performer this season.

Carl Edwards: BUY. This stock is a sleeper. After a sluggish start, Edwards shows a positive trend line and the potential for steady growth. **SN**

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HAROLD HINSON FOR SN (2)



So it turns out Gordon isn't perfect, but chances are, he and his Hendrick friends will win more hardware.



France's vision brought growth—and left potential for the future

There's no question the loss of former NASCAR chairman Bill France Jr., who died June 5 at his Daytona Beach, Fla., home, leaves a void of monumental proportions in the NASCAR universe.

France's legacy is the explosive growth of the sport he loved and lived, and his bequest to the surviving members of the France family is the position of strength NASCAR enjoys today. He left NASCAR with the means and infrastructure necessary to continue the expansion he fostered after taking over the leadership position from his father, William H.G. "Big Bill" France, in 1972 and before passing it on to his son, Brian Z. France, in 2003.

Bill France Jr. shepherded the historic relationship that brought R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to NASCAR as the Cup sponsor for three decades. NASCAR was a cap and T-shirt sport when France took the reins from his father, but over the course of his tenure, France broad-

ened stock car racing's fan base exponentially and earned the respect of mainstream corporate America.

Once a sport that thrived primarily on sponsorships related to the automotive industry, NASCAR now commands substantial portions of the marketing budgets of many of the nation's largest and most powerful corporations. Underscoring the desirability of exposure in the NASCAR realm, companies such as AT&T and series sponsor Sprint Nextel have gone to court to assert and protect their rights to market their products and services within the sport.

Given France's larger-than-life presence and the resolute manner in which he ruled the sport, it's difficult to conceive of NASCAR without him.



KELLY JORDAN / AP

Dale Earnhardt Jr. has said it made his late father proud to get close to France because not a lot of other people did.

"It's going to be hard to be a part of this sport without him," says four-time champion Jeff Gordon. "He was a real soft-hearted guy who had a real hard shell on the outside. He ran things with an iron fist, but he had a passion for this sport that a lot of people maybe didn't get a chance to see. I loved being around him."

Yes, France will be missed—profoundly. But he did what great leaders do. To his family, and to the world, France left a thriving enterprise full of potential that is yet to be realized.—R.S.



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Yeah, it's still a 3-4. But this one rocks.

Game on! Cowboys are drooling over Phillips' 'D'

By Dennis Dillon

ddillon@sportingnews.com

The 3-4 defense, like Baskin-Robbins ice cream, comes in a variety of flavors. The one the Cowboys played under Bill Parcells was sound and generally effective, but it had as much pizzazz as chocolate chip. New coach Wade Phillips' 3-4 is more like Love Potion No. 31.

It is a one-gap scheme, which distinguishes it from other 3-4 defenses. Movement, pressure and unpredictability are some of the ingredients. The system also has built-in versatility to accommodate the personnel.

Phillips doesn't force his players to fit his defense; he designs his defense to fit the players and their skills. For example, when Phillips was defensive coordinator in San Diego, Ben Leber was an outside linebacker who covered tight ends and backs and Shawne Merriman was an outside linebacker who rushed the passer.



JAMES D. SMITH / ICON SM

"Everybody thinks it's the X's and O's, but it's the Moes and Joes," says Phillips, who turns 60 next week and has been a 3-4 guru since he joined the Houston Oilers as an assistant coach in 1976.

It wouldn't have mattered if the Cowboys had suited up Moe, Joe, Larry, Curly and Shemp last season. Their 3-4 still would have been long on convention and short on suspense. Don't get the wrong idea; Parcells was a master coach whose defense was good enough to take four different teams to the playoffs and win two Super Bowls. But by the end of last season, opponents had started to figure out the Cowboys.

Even the Dallas players had to stifle some yawns. But the first time Phillips showed them tape of the 3-4 defense he ran in San Diego, they salivated, imagining what it might produce in Big D in 2007. "It's like we have more tools in the toolbox," says inside linebacker Bradie James.

A look at how the Cowboys' old 3-4 compares with their new one:

LINEMEN

Bill's way: Think of Woody Allen and his fellow escaped convicts shackled together in *Take the Money and Run*. OK, that might be a stretch. But Parcells' read-and-react, two-gap system—in which each lineman lined head-up on an offensive lineman, feet parallel, and stepped right or left depending on which gap he had to fill—stifled the ability to pressure the quarterback.

Wade's world: They'll play a one-gap scheme in a staggered stance and "shade" the man across from them. For example, instead of lining up directly in front of the center, nose tackle Jason Ferguson might be on one of his shoulders. This will allow the linemen to shoot gaps, which puts them in better position to rush the passer and make more tackles in the backfield.

X-factor: Ferguson. After having only one sack in the last two seasons in Dallas, he's looking to bring back some of the pass-rush moves he used with the Jets.



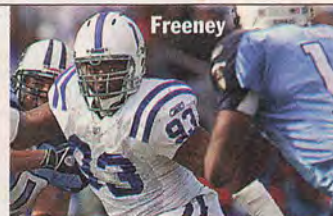
'Joe Gibbs has a pretty impressive team that could have a key addition soon. Unfortunately for Redskins fans, we're talking about his NASCAR drivers.'

Are the Redskins motoring along or stuck in neutral?
Let Vinnie Iyer know at [sportingnews.com](mailto:viyer@sportingnews.com).



Look for the Steelers to use the no-huddle offense more often next season. Coordinator **Bruce Arians** and QB **Ben Roethlisberger** spent much of March and April studying tape and modifying that part of the playbook. Roethlisberger feels comfortable in the no-huddle—he played in it at Miami (Ohio)—and it will give him a chance to call audibles, which is every quarterback's dream. Arians refers to it as a change-of-pace no-huddle, not a fast-paced no-huddle. ➤ Here's comforting news for AFC South quarterbacks: Colts DE **Dwight Freeney** is working on his speed this offseason. Freeney has been concentrating on exploding off the snap by running 10-yard sprints and shuttles. As is his yearly custom, he also will return to Syracuse to work out with strength and conditioning coach **William Hicks**. "You just have to keep sharpening your sword," Freeney says. ➤ DT **Ryan Pickett**, a Rams No. 1 draft pick in 2001 who never lived up to expectations during five seasons in St. Louis, has found his niche in Green Bay's defense.

Pickett is a one-gap tackle big enough to eat up double-teams and provide a push up the middle. Although he had no sacks last season, his ability to push the pocket made it easier for Pro Bowl DE **Aaron Kampman** and others to corral the quarterback. ➤ Cardinals coach **Ken Whisenhunt** has singled out QB **Matt Leinart** for his commitment to the team's offseason program. Leinart, who has bulked up to 235 pounds—5 more than his playing weight as a rookie—demonstrated his power in improbable fashion last week. Before a Diamondbacks-Giants game at Chase Park, Leinart hit three home runs in batting practice—the last one traveling an estimated 400 feet. For the record, the lefthanded quarterback swung from the right side of the plate. ➤ DT **Sam Adams** is 34 and a veteran of 13 seasons, but he still has a quick first step for a big



LINEBACKERS

Bill's way: The two outside men provided most of the pass-rushing pressure. DeMarcus Ware had 11½ sacks, but he became a marked man after Greg Ellis suffered a torn Achilles' tendon November 12. Inside 'backers James and Akin Ayodele regularly had to try to maneuver around, or go through, guards who were 330-pound roadblocks.

Wade's world: The outside 'backers play a lot wider than in most 3-4s. If the offense slides its protection to one side, the outside 'backer on the other side might have to be picked up by a back—a favorable mismatch for Dallas. James and Ayodele still will tend to the run, but they will rush more often.

X-factor: Anthony Spencer. The Cowboys drafted him in the first round because they think he can switch from college down lineman to outside linebacker. If he can make the transition and Ellis makes a healthy return, Dallas will have a solid pass-rushing rotation on the outside.

DEFENSIVE BACKS

Bill's way: The lack of a pass rush up front put more pressure on these guys. Cornerbacks Terence Newman and Anthony Henry played a lot of press coverage and the safeties split the deep half of the field.

Wade's world: Don't expect to see much cover 2. Strong safety Roy Williams had five picks in '06, but shadowing receivers isn't his forte. He'll line up closer to the line more often and sometimes will be like another linebacker. Phillips still must determine how much zone the corners will play.

X-factor: Free safety Ken Hamlin. In Seattle, he sometimes jumped shallow crossing routes and got beat from behind. But Phillips likes Hamlin's range and thinks he'll be a good center fielder and quarterback in the secondary. **SN**



man and eats up a lot of space on the line. Those are two traits that made him attractive to the Broncos, who signed him last week. The Broncos would like Adams at a weight in which he could play 28-30 snaps a game and have the endurance to be a factor in the fourth quarter. Adams told Denver media he currently weighs 345. ➤ The Bears, who had all of their 2006 draft picks under contract by the Fourth of July, are on a similar pace this year. They have signed seven of their nine selections, the exceptions being first-round TE **Greg Olsen** and second-round DE **Dan Bazuin**. The point man in this process is senior director of football administration and general counsel **Cliff Stein**, who seems to have good rapport with player agents. "I think Cliff does a real good job of being forthcoming and staying with the Bears' game plan," says agent **Gary Wichard**, who also tipped his hat to Bears president **Ted Phillips** and G.M. **Jerry Angelo**. "They're consistent. They have a strategy, and they're very aggressive in trying to get deals done."

speedreads

If I'm a Dolphins fan, I'm tempering my enthusiasm over the arrival of new quarterback Trent Green. He'll turn 37 in July, he suffered a serious concussion that sidelined him for eight games last season, and he clearly is on the downside of his career. But if Green stays healthy, he should be able to bridge the gap until rookie John Beck is ready.

Dallas' DeMarcus Ware could have a monster season. He rang up 11½ sacks last season even though fellow outside linebacker Greg Ellis missed the final seven games with an injury. Imagine what Ware will be able to do if Ellis is healthy and rookie Anthony Spencer pitches in as an outside pass rusher.

Even if he was just speaking for effect over their disagreement about benefits for retired players, NFL Players Association president Gene Upshaw was wrong to refer to Joe DeLamielleure and say, "I'm going to break his damn neck."

1 COLTS Tarik Glenn is powerful, athletic and adept at moving laterally for the team's patented stretch play. Right tackle Ryan Diem is a strong presence in the running game and pass protection.



JOHN DUINN FOR SN

2 BENGALS Levi Jones, who is rehabbing from a left knee scope, is an extremely athletic left tackle. Four-time Pro Bowl right tackle Willie Anderson is aging but remains tough and competitive.

3 CHARGERS A Pro Bowl choice as a rookie last season, Marcus McNeill runs like a tight end, has long arms and flashes a mean streak. Right tackle Shane Olivea is physical but would be a better fit inside.

4 PATRIOTS Pro Bowl left tackle Matt Light is smart and solid but struggles with speed rushers. Nick Kaczur and Ryan O'Callaghan are competing at right tackle.

5 RAVENS A perennial stalwart at left tackle, Jonathan Ogden (6-9, 345) has size, speed and long arms. Right tackle Adam Terry has the physical tools, but questions linger about his mental toughness.

6 STEELERS Left tackle Marvel Smith has learned to drop-step and get his hands in good position, which has made him reliable in pass protection. Max Starks is still developing on the right side.

7 TITANS Michael Roos and David Stewart have contrasting but effective styles. Roos is athletic and good on his feet while Stewart is a mauler with a mean streak.

8 JETS D'Brickashaw Ferguson has the athleticism and technique to be an elite left

AFC

FOCUS ON OFFENSE

tackle, but he needs to add weight and strength. Right tackle Anthony Clement is vulnerable in pass protection.

9 JAGUARS Left tackle Khalif Barnes is a dominant run blocker. The club acquired Tony Pashos to firm up the right side of the pocket in the passing game.

10 BRONCOS Left tackle Matt Lepsis, who is returning from a knee injury, has the quickness to thrive in the team's movement-heavy system. Opposite him will be Erik Pears, a mauler in the run game, or the seasoned Adam Meadows.

11 BILLS Jason Peters is a rising star on the left side with solid athleticism and agility. Right tackle Langston Walker can engulf defenders at the point of attack but must improve his footwork and technique.

12 BROWNS Rookie left tackle Joe Thomas has elite talent and the maturity to start right away. Kevin Shaffer could switch to the right side if Ryan Tucker isn't

ready after suffering from mental issues in 2006.

13 CHIEFS Left tackle Damion McIntosh is physical and should provide security against top pass rushers. Chris Terry has minimal experience on the right side, and the bench is unproven.

14 DOLPHINS Vernon Carey, who anchored the line at right tackle in 2006, faces the challenge of moving to the left side. Right tackle L.J. Shelton provides some pop but has a history of underachieving.

15 TEXANS For five seasons this position has been a major concern, and this year is no different. Left tackle Charles Spencer's health is an issue, and Eric Winston lacks experience at right tackle.

16 RAIDERS Robert Gallery might move back to the right side after his nightmare '06. Left tackle Barry Sims has experience but is exposed by speed rushers. If either stumbles, Paul McQuistan could step in.

TOP 5

1. Jonathan Ogden, Ravens. Ogden, 32, isn't as nimble as he once was, but he still can engulf pass rushers and reach the second level as a run blocker.

2. Tarik Glenn, Colts. Even at 31, Glenn continues to be light on his feet and is extremely effective as a run blocker and pass protector. He is a wall on Peyton Manning's blind side.

3. Willie Anderson, Bengals. One of the NFL's best right tackles over the past 10 years, he is a shutdown pass protector and a road-grading run blocker.

4. Matt Light, Patriots. He has good feet, takes great angles to his blocks and is an excellent wall-off blocker. Without Light, Tom Brady wouldn't be Tom Brady.

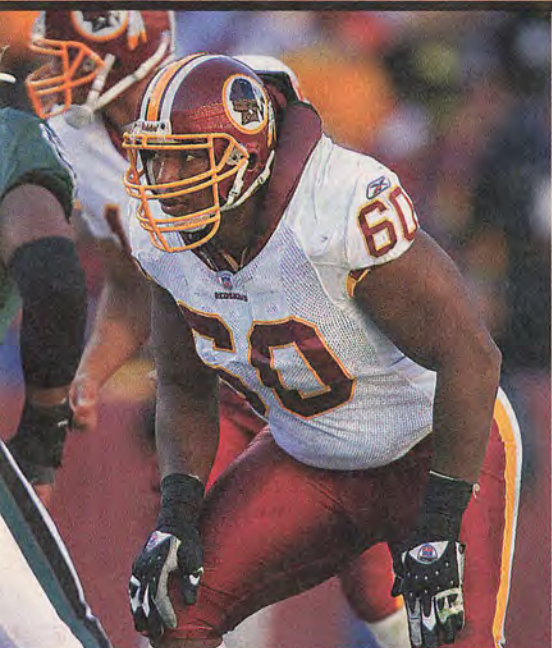
5. Marcus McNeill. McNeill is a dominant run blocker and very athletic in pass protection. He'll be an anchor on the Chargers' line for years.



CORRESPONDENTS: Baltimore, Mike Preston; Buffalo, Allen Wilson; Cincinnati, Chick Ludwig; Cleveland, Steve Doerschuk; Denver, Lee Rasizer; Houston, Megan Manfull; Indianapolis, Mike Chappell; Jacksonville, Michael C. Wright; Kansas City, Adam Teicher; Miami, Jeff Darlington; New England, John Tomase; New York, Rich Cimini; Oakland, Steve Corkran; Pittsburgh, Gerry Dulac; San Diego, Kevin Acee; Tennessee, Jim Wyatt.

SIVE TACKLES

NFC



BOB LEVERONE / SN

1 REDSKINS Left tackle **Chris Samuels** has good agility, strength and versatility and has improved in handling speed rushers. Jon Jansen is strong at the point of attack and has improved his technique on the right side.

2 EAGLES William Thomas had a strong 2006 on the left side after battling a blood clot in his leg and back surgery in '05. Right tackle Jon Runyan remains a model of consistency after 11 seasons.

3 SEAHAWKS Left tackle Walter Jones has nimble feet, which allow him to play with great balance and recover quickly. Right tackle Sean Locklear has a powerful first punch but needs to become more consistent.

4 SAINTS Jammal Brown adjusted to the left side quicker than anyone could have expected and made the Pro Bowl in his second season. Right tackle Jon Stinchcomb is dependable.

5 RAMS Orlando Pace remains one of the league's top left tackles. Right tackle Alex Barron isn't in Pace's class but has the size and skills to become an upper-tier blocker.

6 PACKERS Brett Favre has been able to depend on Chad Clifton and Mark Tauscher for seven seasons, and there shouldn't be a major drop-off this year.

7 COWBOYS The team expects a big season from left tackle Flozell Adams, who is in the final year of his contract. Right tackle Marc Colombo is a solid pass blocker when he doesn't face speed rushers.

8 BEARS Left tackle John Tait, recovering from ankle surgery, and durable right tackle Fred Miller are solid, but both struggle at times with smaller, quicker ends.

9 VIKINGS After struggling to adjust to the team's zone-blocking schemes last year, left tackle Bryant McKinnie looks more comfortable this spring. Right tackle Ryan Cook is a converted center who has quick feet.

10 49ERS Left tackle Jonas Jennings is a forceful drive blocker and consistently closes down the blind-side pass rush. On the right side, Kwame Harris remains vulnerable to speed rushers.

11 PANTHERS Jordan Gross likely will return to the right side, where he has Pro Bowl potential. Left tackle Travelle Wharton needs to improve his pass blocking and prove he can stay healthy.

12 FALCONS Left tackle Wayne Gandy isn't spectacular but will be fine in the team's shift to a power scheme. On the right side, Todd Weiner is stout in pass protection.

13 BUCCANEERS Left tackle Luke Petitgout provides an upgrade in pass protection. Right tackle Jeremy Trueblood is a solid run blocker but must limit his mistakes.

14 GIANTS Kareem McKenzie is solid on the right with good size (6-6, 327) and strength. The likely candidate to fill the worrisome vacancy on the left side is the versatile David Diehl.

15 LIONS Coming off his worst NFL season, left tackle Jeff Backus has the



TOM HAUCK FOR SN

TOP5

1. Walter Jones, Seahawks. With his ideal combination of size, balance, long arms and footwork, Jones is the best tackle in the business.

2. Orlando Pace, Rams. Age is creeping into the picture and he missed half of last season with a torn triceps, but Pace has the skills to be an elite player for another couple of years.

3. Jon Runyan, Eagles. He is not an elite athlete, but he is a great lineman. He makes his blocks and plays the game with old-school gusto.

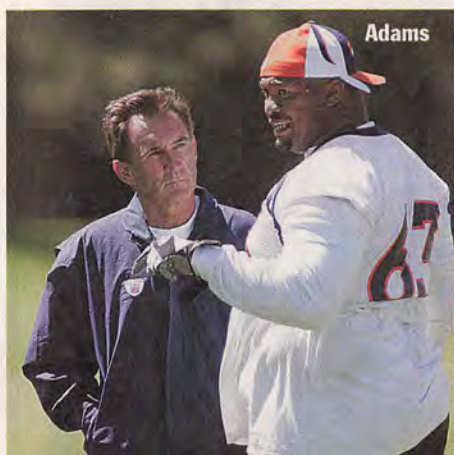
4. Chris Samuels, Redskins. Samuels is athletic, durable and intelligent and flashes dominance in the running and passing games.

5. Jammal Brown, Saints. Brown is a young stud who showed his athleticism and versatility by moving to left tackle in 2006 and anchoring the Saints' line.

ability to protect the passer but is average in the run game. George Foster is athletic on the right side but sometimes lacks focus.

16 CARDINALS Either right tackle Oliver Ross, who was benched last year, or left tackle Mike Gandy could lose his starting job to rookie Levi Brown. Regardless, it's a weak group.

CORRESPONDENTS: Arizona, Kent Somers; Atlanta, D. Orlando Ledbetter; Carolina, Pat Yasinskas; Chicago, Brad Biggs; Dallas, Jean-Jacques Taylor; Detroit, Tom Kowalski; Green Bay, Tom Silverstein; Minnesota, Kevin Seifert; New Orleans, Mike Triplett; New York, Ralph Vacchiano; Philadelphia, Mark Eckel; St. Louis, Jim Thomas; San Francisco, Dennis Georgatos; Seattle, Clare Farnsworth; Tampa Bay, Roy Cummings; Washington, Paul Woody.



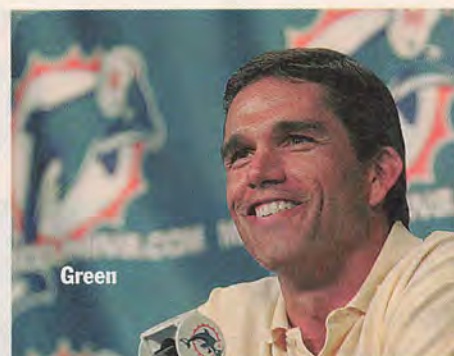
JACK DEMPSEY / AP

The **BRONCOS** added plenty of bulk at defensive tackle by signing **Sam Adams** and trading for **Jimmy Kennedy**. Adams has been a run-stuffing force in his career, but he is 34, in the 345-pound range and coming off knee surgery. The 320-pound Kennedy, a 2003 first-round pick, was a huge disappointment with the Rams. He struggled with injuries, often got pushed off the ball and couldn't help upgrade a porous run defense. ... The **TITANS** signed former Seahawks CB **Kelly Herndon**, who could be a starter or the nickel back. Herndon helps fill a void at corner created by the suspension of **Pacman Jones**. A starter for Seattle in 2006, Herndon is physical but lacks the speed to run with the fastest receivers. ... The **STEELERS** expect a major contribution from WR **Santonio Holmes**. After displaying big-play ability and good hands as a rookie, he has earned a starting role. He has the speed to get deep and make downfield plays, something the team has lacked since **Plaxico Burress** left. ... Look for **COLTS** rookie WR **Anthony Gonzalez** to make an immediate impact working out of the slot. He has good speed, reliable hands and the ability to pick up yards after the catch. All he needs is time to get comfortable with QB **Peyton Manning**. ... **TEXANS** coach **Gary Kubiak** and coordinator **Mike Sherman** have added wrinkles to the playbook to try to blend the best ideas from their experiences with the Broncos and Packers. The Texans' basic philosophy will be to build a strong running game around new QB **Matt Schaub** and to find ways to isolate WR **Andre Johnson**. ... Among **RAVENS** wide receivers, only **Mark Clayton** has looked better this offseason than **Devario Darling**. But Darling has been impressive in past offseasons only to disappear in the regular season. He has good



MICHAEL CONROY / AP

leaping ability and runs good routes but lacks consistent hands. ... The **RAIDERS** have a lot of competition at receiver, but look for **Doug Gabriel** to be the No. 3 and to make some big plays. He has good size, speed and hands. He played well early last season with the Patriots but fell from favor after a critical fumble. ... Before the draft, **BILLS** rookie RB **Dwayne Wright** was described as a physical, between-the-tackles runner. But in minicamps, he also has displayed nimble feet and good hands. Fellow rookie **Marshawn Lynch** and **Anthony Thomas** are expected to get the bulk of the carries, but the team wants to incorporate Wright into the offense. ... **David Barrett** is working with the **JETS'** first team after hernia surgery, but he still needs a strong training camp to solidify himself as one of the team's top three cornerbacks. He is tough at the line of scrimmage but doesn't have ideal man-to-man skills. ... **CHARGERS** TE **Brandon Manumaleuna** is always battling to stay below 300 pounds, but his size and strength help him in his primary role as a blocker. Pro Bowl TE **Antonio Gates** has become a better blocker by observing Manumaleuna. ... **BENGALS** CB **Johnathan Joseph**, who is expected to win a starting job, broke a bone in his foot in minicamp but is expected to be ready for training camp. Joseph led the team with 19 pass breakups as a rookie, but he dropped 10 potential interceptions and has been working on his ball skills.



WILFREDO LEE / AP

Rotating quarterbacks

The **DOLPHINS** finally acquired QB **Trent Green**, which means **Daunte Culpepper** is all but certain to leave. Green turns 37 next month and missed much of last season because of a concussion. He is a smart, detail-oriented player who has directed high-



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

powered offenses in the past. Green has worked with coach **Cam Cameron** and quarterbacks coach **Terry Shea** and is already familiar with much of the offense's terminology. Green will need excellent protection to succeed, but the Dolphins' line is a question mark.

Meanwhile, the Green trade means

Brodie Croyle is on track to be the **CHIEFS'** starting quarterback. He has been impressive in offseason workouts, though he had to deal with the distraction of Green's presence before the trade. Now, instead of sharing first-team snaps with Green and **Damon Huard**, Croyle can get most of the work.

REHAB UPDATES

BROWNS RB **Jamal Lewis**, who had surgery to remove bone spurs in his ankle, has been quick to the hole and made sharp cuts in noncontact drills. Lewis battled nagging injuries in 2005 and '06, when he averaged 3.4 and 3.6 yards per carry. He is ahead of schedule, and the team is counting on him to be a workhorse. ... **JAGUARS** DT **Marcus Stroud** (ankle) is physically able to practice, but the team wants to protect him by keeping him off the field. The Jaguars want Stroud to focus on his conditioning to help him avoid the nagging injuries that have chipped away at his production. Coach **Jack Del Rio** says Stroud is training like he's on a mission. ... Save for one set of agility drills during **PATRIOTS** minicamp, RB **Laurence Maroney** was a spectator. He clearly favored his surgically repaired shoulder by playing catch lefthanded and staying away from the action. Maroney likely will be ready for training camp, but his conditioning and weightlifting regimens have been affected.



Maroney

STEPHAN SAVOIA / AP

INSIDE THE NFC

Trainers have **BUCS** RB **Cadillac Williams** running drills either barefoot or in sneakers to strengthen the muscles in his feet. Williams, who has been consistently hampered by foot ailments, also has been fitted with special shoes because he is flat-footed and has extra-wide feet. ... **Mathias Kiwanuka** has looked a little lost at times as he makes the conversion from defensive end to linebacker for the **GIANTS**, but it's not because he's not doing his homework. Kiwanuka is diligently studying film and the playbook to learn his responsibilities. More playing time will help



Kiwanuka

BOB LEVERONE / SN

his comfort level. ... The **FALCONS** have shown no interest in bringing in another quarterback, such as **Daunte Culpepper**, as a backup to **Michael Vick** despite Vick's brewing legal issues. The team is prepared to go to camp with **Joey Harrington**, **D.J. Shockley** and **Chris Redman**, though there are major questions about each. Shockley has the arm that best fits coach **Bobby Petrino's** vertical passing game, but he hasn't played in an NFL game. Throwing deep is not Harrington's strength, and Redman is not very mobile and hasn't played in a game since 2003. ... **PACKERS** rookie G **Allen Barbre** (6-4, 300) is a powerful, physical specimen with good feet, but he has to show he can make the jump from Missouri Southern to the NFL. He has been impressive in his first month with the team, though, and could be a top backup. ... **VIKINGS** QB **Tarvaris Jackson** has been inconsistent in drills—too many fumbles and too much indecision in the pocket—as he continues to learn the West Coast offense. ... **49ERS** backup DE **Melvin Oliver** is out for the season after tearing his ACL in noncontact drills. Free-agent signee **Sam Rayburn** will fill his role in the rotation behind



McNabb

GEORGE WIDMAN / AP

exhibition game. ... **Bertrand Berry** (triceps) is almost 100 percent, but the offseason practices he has missed could be costly because the **CARDINALS** are asking him to move from end to outside linebacker in the 3-4. At least he won't have to drop into coverage much because he's the team's best pass rusher.

REHAB UPDATES

SS **Roman Harper** and DE **Rob Ninkovich** are back after suffering season-ending knee injuries as rookies with the **SAINTS**. Harper is smart, physical and effective in run support. He was a starter before his injury and is lining up with the first team this offseason. Ninkovich hopes to regain his job as a pass-rush specialist, but he needs to add strength to be more effective against the run. ... As a veteran who knows the system, **PANTHERS** RE **Mike Rucker** (knee) won't be rushed into the lineup. He'll likely play in an exhibition game or two, but the regular season is the primary goal. **Stanley McClover** and **Charles Johnson** will get most of the reps at right end early in camp. ... **EAGLES** QB **Donovan McNabb** (knee) hasn't done much during practices, but he has been on hand to show support for his teammates. McNabb says his goal is to play in the team's second

LE **Bryant Young** in the new 3-4 defense. Rayburn has the size to play against the run, and he uses his hands well to disengage from blockers. ... CB **Jerametrius Butler** has a history of injuries but also has a knack for making plays on the ball, which is why the **REDSKINS** signed him shortly after he was released by the Rams. Butler provides insurance in case **Shawn Springs** gets hurt again or **Fred Smoot** doesn't

bounce back from a poor season with the Vikings. ... The **BEARS** likely will use a rotation during DT **Tank Johnson's** eight-game suspension. **Antonio Garay** is a scrapper who plays to

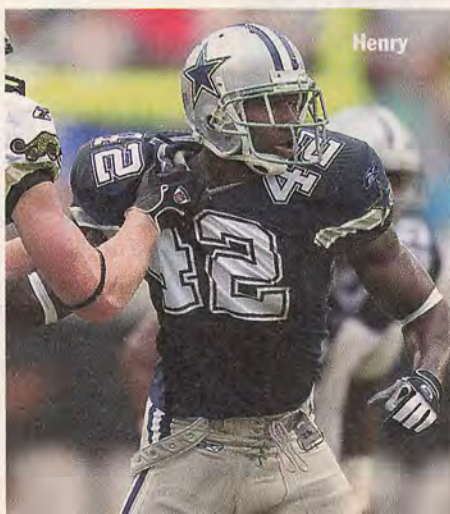


Garay

JAY DROWNS / SN

the whistle but can be driven off the ball. **Dusty Dvoracek**, who missed his rookie season, needs to do a better job of staying on his feet. Newcomer **Anthony Adams** is stout but undersized (6-0, 299). ... S **Daniel Bullocks** has looked like a much-improved player during the **LIONS'** offseason practices. Bullocks struggled with injuries and made poor decisions as a rookie, but he is playing with confidence and could win a starting job.

Bullocks has good size (6-0, 212) and enough speed to play free or strong safety. ... One of **Jim Mora's** first moves as the **SEAHAWKS'** new secondary coach was to switch CB **Marcus Trufant** to the left side, where he played so well in his first two years. Trufant has the explosiveness and fluid hips to cover any receiver, but he struggles to make plays on the ball. ... By trading DT **Jimmy Kennedy** to Denver, the **RAMS** signaled they are confident rookie **Adam Carriker** can make the move to tackle after playing mostly end at Nebraska. Carriker impressed the coaches with his work inside during minicamp. The Rams still need a tackle and could renew their interest in trading for Carolina's **Kris Jenkins**. ... The **COWBOYS** flirted with moving **Anthony Henry** to safety, but he'll stay at corner. He is a big, physical player who excels in press coverage and against the run.



Henry

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Your national playoff is dead. Forever.

Why is no one upset that we put up with this BCS?

By Matt Hayes

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He sure talked a big game, God bless him. A new direction, a defining philosophy, a revitalized road map for the 21st century.

Unfortunately, this is what it looked like last week when Bernie Machen, Florida's big-talkin', sky-walkin' president, eventually skulked out of the principal's office:

"I am now persuaded," Machen said post-mortem, "that the best way to work is to try to proceed within the BCS structure."

See Bernie pound his chest about a national

speedread

Next up on the NCAA's list of things to do: add a fifth year of eligibility. Then watch how fast coaches run off fifth-year players who haven't developed in the previous four to make room for freshmen who may or may not be the real deal.



Weekend at Bernie's had more life than Machen's failed playoff pitch.

PHIL SANDLIN / AP

playoff. See Bernie hold his hat in his hands.

Pfft.

We had SPORTING NEWS spies in the conference room at the SEC meetings (read: principal's office), and this is how the momentous occasion played out.

Machen: "Gentlemen, college football is in dire need of a playoff."

Eleven other SEC presi-

dents: "No."

And there you have it, everyone. Your national playoff is dead. Forever.

If the most powerful president in the most powerful conference in college sports can't spark change, who can? I actually felt sorry for the poor guy. In a matter of hours, his grand plan to right the wrongs of the world turned to complete, utter capitulation in the face of reality.

Media: "Uh, Bernie, didn't you describe this as your mission?"

Machen: "I actually voted for the national playoff before I voted against it."

This, however, is what I can't get my mind around: The very public results of this closed-door brouhaha had all the impact of North Texas and Southeastern Louisiana agreeing to play a home-and-home.

No one cared.

No expose from the Worldwide Leader. No calls from blowhard activists insinuating that university presidents refuse to agree to a playoff because a playoff would generate more revenue and more revenue would mean players better get paid. *If there's a playoff, there must be a payoff.*

For all the yapping and yammering about the broken system, we've heard barely a peep from the silent majority (coaches and athletic directors) about the most significant—and failed—pitch made by someone with clout.

On the other side of the spectrum, NCAA president Myles Brand was at the Women's College World Series, where he addressed, of all things, a football playoff.

"The NCAA's role in it," Brand said, "is to be supportive of the schools and the conferences for whatever it is they decide to do."

Let me translate: *My bosses are the university presidents; whatever they say, I do.*

Look, this thing is bigger than all of us. Bigger than the most powerful president in the most powerful conference in college sports. Bigger than my faithful pen pal BigTex, who can't seem to understand why something so simple as an eight- or 16-team national playoff can't be whipped up and spread out.

Hey Girlyman:

If you media boys would stop making excuses for those money-hungry fools that run college football, maybe we'd have ourselves a playoff. Maybe one day, you'll sack up.

Or get kicked there like Bernie did.

SN

INSIDE DISH

This is a key season for New Orleans in the BCS landscape. First, the city must prove it can handle three bowl games (New Orleans Bowl, Sugar Bowl, BCS title game) in 18 days. Then it will face competition from bowls that want to take its spot in the championship rotation. The current contract runs through 2010 but will be renegotiated sometime next year. Cotton Bowl officials already are promoting their



Boise State and Ian Johnson will get fat on cake and top it with ... Sugar?

JAY DROWNS / SN

game and new stadium (Dallas Cowboys Stadium) to the BCS, and the Chick-fil-A, Capital One and Alamo—three of the best-run bowls in the business—also will make pitches. >

Boise State has the nation's longest winning streak (13 games), and it should be 24 in a row going into the regular-season finale at Hawaii. That game likely will feature two unbeaten non-BCS teams—have you seen their cake schedules?—playing for a spot in the Sugar Bowl. > The pressure to win increased significantly last week for New Mexico State coach Hal Mumme when he failed again to get a discrimination case against him thrown out. Four

former NMSU players allege Mumme discriminated against them because they are Muslim. Universities don't keep coaches who cost them off the field and on it. Mumme's teams are 4-20 in his two seasons in Las Cruces.



Do you love the SEC? Choose from five editions of our College Football Preview that feature bonus SEC coverage. Order your copy at sportingnews.com/books/cfootball/index.html.

Now that the press conferences are over, Billy Donovan is settling down to face a big challenge: building long-term success.

Who says you can't go home—even if it is a little broken?

By Mike DeCourcy

decourcy@sportingnews.com

He accepted a massive pay cut. He endured immense public humiliation. Concerned about anyone he might have offended, he prostrated himself in apology. When he starts his next season, he will be in charge of a team that lost almost every player who mattered.

Man, this guy really must want to coach the Florida Gators.

Billy Donovan went through everything short of fire-walking and mortification of the flesh to get this job.

To get it back, I mean.

"It really came down to my heart," he says, and you have to believe him because it's the only rational explanation for the level of irrationality he had to embrace in order to extricate himself from a signed contract to coach the Orlando Magic.

Yes, he will become the highest-paid college basketball coach by returning to Florida. For a few days, though, he was one of the highest-paid NBA coaches, which is a better deal.

Rival recruiters will try to spin this episode as evidence he is as comfortable with commitment as Charlie Sheen. Donovan, though, has been married nearly two decades to wife Christine and now, almost certainly, will be attached to Florida about that far into the future. He turned down Kentucky and the NBA in the space of two months. At this point, there's nowhere else to go but down.

Coming off consecutive NCAA championships, that also is true for the Gators, which is what makes Donovan's decision especially intriguing. He will attempt to build a long-term basketball power in a place that has never enjoyed long-term success.

This challenge is greater than many realize. Members of Florida's championship core came from Ten-



Most of Florida's players will be new, but Donovan will face pressure to keep winning big.

nessee, New York and Michigan and joined a few in-state products. The two titles suggest Donovan is on his way to the Hall of Fame, but that roster demonstrates that if he gets there, he'll have spent a lot of hours on the road.

Donovan talks about the "incredible rebuilding process" at hand. Scouts and coaches believe 6-10 Marreese Speights will be excellent, but he won't have much help inside. Several analysts rate the recruiting class No. 1, but not every coach you talk with is convinced this group—outside of McDonald's All American guard Nick Calathes—can deliver immediately.

The good thing is, Donovan no longer recruits to please analysts. So if they like this class, fine, but it's more important that he likes it and that the players love the game. He wants gym rats now, not divas. Having gained early attention for his success as a recruiter, Donovan allowed that to define his program during the middle years of this decade. Few coaches have learned as rapidly from mistakes.

What can he learn from this episode? Mostly, he at last can accept being a college coach—Florida's coach. To get back to where he once belonged, Donovan accepted a five-year no-compete deal requested by the Magic. That prevents him from coaching in the NBA until 2012.

Don't feel badly if you figured Donovan was more of a mover and shaker than a Gators lifer. He thought that himself.

SN

INSIDE DISH

Notre Dame PG **Kyle McAlarney** is back at school after his spring semester suspension, which followed an arrest on marijuana charges. He is one of three players enrolled in a summer minisession and is working out regularly with Fs **Luke Harangody** and **Zach Hillesland**. The Irish are looking forward to pairing McAlarney with sophomore PG **Tory Jackson**—a revelation coaches had after McAlarney's departure—in a dual-point backcourt similar to the one that featured **Chris Thomas** and **Chris Quinn**. ➤

Clemson coaches got good news when 6-9 C **James Mays** withdrew from the NBA draft. The Tigers are a much more dynamic defensive team with Mays at the front of their fullcourt press and cleaning up with shot blocks at the back of their halfcourt man-to-man. ➤ It seems Boston College comes up with one sleeper freshman each year to shock the college basketball world. You won't be surprised this time if you can remember this name: **Rakim Sanders**. A 6-6 wing from Barrington, R.I., Sanders has a pro-type body and a high level of toughness. ➤ With two solid commitments already in place—SG **Mike Rosario** of Jersey City, N.J., and SF **Olu Ashaolu** from Houston—Rutgers remains a factor in the recruitment of elite PF **Samardo Samuels** of Newark, N.J. Most of Samuels' suitors are well-established (North Carolina, UConn, Louisville, Florida), but the Knights are selling him on staying close to home.



BLOG ALERT

'If your thing is debasing successful college basketball coaches on the Internet, you're being disconnected.'

Mike DeCourcy says the message board muggers were sent to the showers when Missouri State and Xavier awarded new contracts to their coaches. Send Mike a message at decourcy@sportingnews.com.



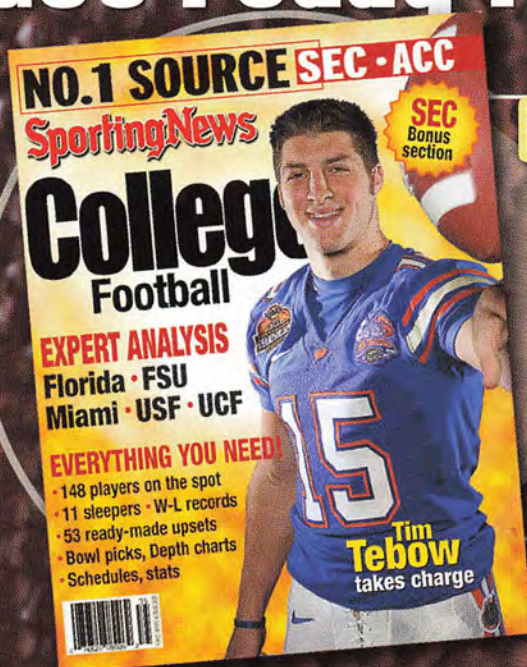
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EXPOSURE

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Sister Rosalba Garcia—that would be her in the Manu Ginobili jersey—and fellow nuns of the Salesian Sisters of Mary Immaculate Province rock the hometown colors as only part of their devotion to the Spurs. Each sister has supported an individual player, seeking divine providence during the playoffs. Which, of course, begs the question: Did the Cavs ever have a prayer in this NBA Finals?

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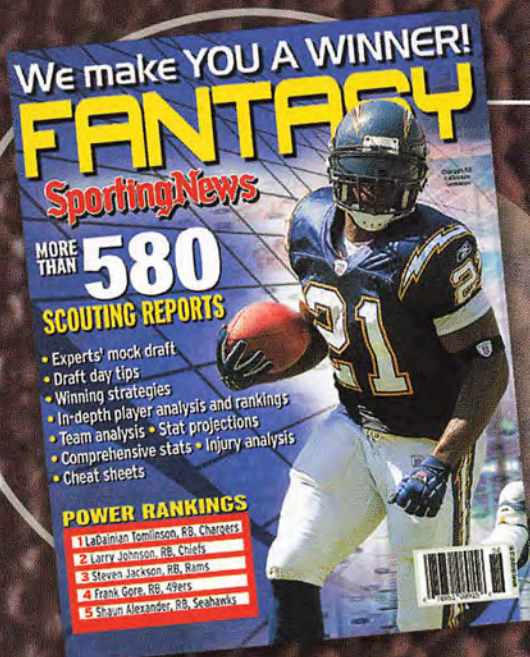
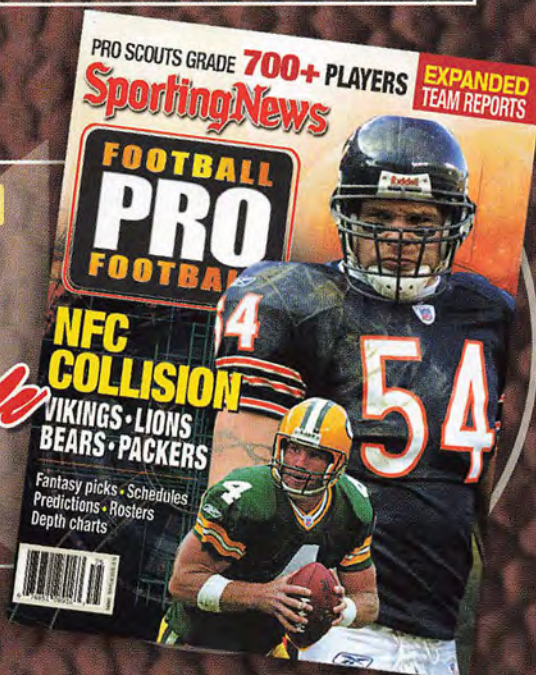
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